



Title: Beyond integration: reformulating physical disability in dance

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**BEYOND INTEGRATION:  
REFORMULATING PHYSICAL DISABILITY IN DANCE**

by

EIMIR MCGRATH

A thesis submitted to the University of Bedfordshire in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**ABSTRACT**

Dance performance that is inclusive of dancers with differing corporealities has the potential to generate positive societal change with regard to perceptions of physical difference. Dance is a valuable site for exploring the placement of the physically disabled body in contemporary society, and for disrupting existing perceptions of disability as transgressive. This can come about through the embodied presence of both dancer and viewer, entering into a relationship grounded in intersubjectivity, without having to rely on symbolic signification.

This thesis examines the placement of disabled bodies in dance performance from the intersecting perspectives of Critical Disability Studies, Performance Studies and Interpersonal Neurobiology in order to formulate a framework for theorizing perceptions of disability, the act of viewing dance and the impact of choreographic intent on viewers' perceptions of physical difference.

In the first section, the sociopolitical placing of disabled bodies in western society is interrogated and a historiological study of both disability identity and the emergence of integrated dance is critically analysed.

The second section provides detailed analyses of three dance performances that are inclusive of dancers with physical disabilities: *GIMP* (2009), Heidi Latsky, *Diagnosis of a Faun* (2009) Tamar Rogoff, and *water burns sun* (2009) Petra Kuppers. Each represents a specific understanding of disability, creating an evolutionary framework for conceptualizing different perceptions of disabled bodies as either monstrous freak, heroic victim or corporeally diverse.

The third section creates connections between new knowledge in interpersonal neurobiology and viewers' perceptions of disability that are activated through viewing dance performance, thus providing an understanding of the mechanisms of discrimination and marginalization of people who embody difference, as well as uncovering mechanisms that have the potential to be reparative.

The application of neuroscientific knowledge to Performance Studies can be modulated and expanded by considering the interpersonal communicative dimension of dance performance that is inclusive of differing corporealities. A theoretical approach that encompasses the neuroscientific conceptualization of intersubjectivity in creating empathic attunement between viewer and dancer, can offer a means of understanding the innate potential of dance performance to bring about societal change.



## DECLARATION

I declare that this is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Bedfordshire.

It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other  
University.

Name of candidate: Eimir McGrath

Signature:

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction. Any Body Can Dance: Reformulating physical disability**

### **1.1 Introduction**

It is an accepted view that dance provides a window into the very heart of any culture, highlighting the beliefs and perceptions that shape the everyday lives of people. Yet, dance provides also a means of critically evaluating and exploring the possibilities for change within that same culture. A dance performance can thus be understood both as an expression of societal values and as a vehicle for initiating change (Dale et al., 2007:107). These apparently contradictory roles of reinforcement and subversion make dance an intriguing site for exploring the placement of the physically disabled body in contemporary society, and for considering how existing perceptions of physical disability as transgressive can be disrupted through dance performance. In order to formulate how this disruption can take place, it is necessary to create a new understanding of how disability is ‘seen’ when located within the wider cultural framework as well as in the context of dance performance.

This thesis draws primarily upon theories, discourses and tenets that are both central and cognate to the field of dance studies. Its narrative, however, is interwoven with references to disability studies and neuroscience – namely disciplines that inform and relate to the proposed hypothesis that dance performance can be used to change societal perceptions of disability. Such interdisciplinary references, moreover, will help contextualize the argument developed in support of this hypothesis.

Living with physical disability in contemporary western society inherently means living within a system that discriminates against, and excludes to varying degrees all those whose bodies do not fit within the accepted notion of normative functioning (Wendell, 1996,

Garland Thomson, 1997, Snyder and Mitchell, 2006, Linton, 2007<sup>i</sup>). This is the lived reality of disability. What should be experienced as a shared interdependence and an acceptance of vulnerability between members of a community, becomes a disempowering experience with disability being perceived as the burdensome responsibility of a paternalistic mindset. This thesis explores the use of dance as one possible means of changing that mindset.

The author's own experience as a professional psychotherapist involved in providing emotional support to clients with physical disabilities, has provided invaluable in-depth as well as intimate knowledge of the difficulties encountered daily by these clients. Being also a ballet teacher and a Laban Community Dance practitioner, the author was able to complement and further the psychotherapist knowledge with a hands-on approach to the value of dance as a means of integrating marginalized groups. Using dance as a medium to enhance relationships and foster acceptance had proved very successful within both educational and therapeutic settings and reinforced the belief that dance performance could be a possible agent of change. As such, this belief played a key role in the formulation of the ensuing arguments. As it will be demonstrated, that particular use of the dance medium provides both a means of exploring the fundamental issues surrounding physical disability regarding embodied presence, while offering a means of addressing those issues, especially the underlying experience of disempowerment.

Having witnessed such disempowerment time and again as a member of a multidisciplinary clinical team working with children and adults with physical disabilities, it became obvious that the communal response to bodies that are differently abled tends to be based on a combination of not only pity, but also at times an underlying disgust and need for avoidance, a reaction related to a primordial emotional response that identifies difference as threatening (Cozolino, 2006:266)<sup>ii</sup>. When disability is considered as a social construction, it uncovers the existence of learned responses that can provoke an uncomfortable sympathy



coupled with a patronizing admiration for the disabled individual, imagining an ongoing struggle for survival as a result of the burden of being disabled. Sometimes an even greater degree of admiration is extended to the perceived ‘carers’ of those with disabilities, reflecting a continuing understanding of disability that is based on deficit and rehabilitation, contained within a medical interpretation of embodied difference. The non-disabled professionals involved in the care of disabled clients can easily be drawn into accepting the societally imposed regulatory role of containing these unruly bodies either within a regime of attempted normalization and acquiescence, or by upholding an exclusionary ableist understanding of disability as ‘not really-human’ (Kumari Campbell, 2012:215).

Environmental restrictions exist, preventing full participation at a societal level as these factors continue to place limits on social interactions for people with disabilities. Disability activist and wheelchair user Simi Linton writes of her experience in trying to access a building at Columbia University (Linton, 2007:57). She describes the huge flight of steps as ‘arrogant’ and ‘imperious because of their rejection of me’; their presence as the primary means of access seemed to state to her ‘The worthy can climb up to me, I will not kneel down and open my doors to those below me’ (ibid.). Linton’s reading of the steps at Columbia University creates a metaphor that can be applied within this introduction in two distinct ways, one in relation to dance and disabled bodies, the other in relation to societal attitudes towards disability. Although unintended by Linton, interpreting the word ‘steps’ in a dance context reflects the exclusionary elements that have been inherent in codified western theatre dance. Traditionally, the disabled body had no place other than as exotic freak because of an embodiment that did not fit the notion of who can legitimately be seen as a dancer, or who has the physical capacity to accurately reproduce the ‘steps’. In Linton’s reading, the steps represent the limitations placed on her not only by her physical environment but also by the attitudes that are contained within the structuring of that environment. These two readings will

be employed by firstly critically examining the existing placement of the disabled body with reference to current theoretical trends in sociology and disability discourses. This referencing will provide a contextual background to the more pertinent theorizing of disability within performance studies in general and dance studies in particular. Secondly, this placement will be linked to an exploration of the potential for change in perceptions of disability through the use of dance performance. The concept of disability will be deconstructed and reformulated in terms of embodied presence which encompasses all forms of corporeal diversity. This embodied presence will be explored in terms of an intersubjectivity which is not qualitatively evaluated, an exploration as seen through the application of a physical norm.

Firstly, the placement of disability within a societal frame will be critically examined by considering the diverse elements that inform the creation of the notion 'disability'. This is a complex task which will be largely undertaken in Chapter Two. Here, the language that defines disability will be investigated, including an exploration of the definitions that are particularly relevant to this study. The use of terminology in relation to disability is fraught with difficulties. Underlying meanings are fluid, depending on specific cultural interpretations that can vary widely. What is an acceptable descriptor in one cultural setting can be deeply offensive in another. As terms become subsumed into everyday usage, there is a tendency for evolving connotations to transform from the neutral to the derogatory, and stereotypical perceptions and discrimination consequently are reinforced by the language in use (Barnes and Mercer, 2010:11). The choice of specific terminology can also identify a particular theoretical perspective that in itself may become a limitation. In order to avoid these pitfalls, and to reflect the inherent imprecision that is contained within a constantly evolving lexicon, a range of terms will be used interchangeably throughout this research. The most common words for describing embodied presence, 'disabled' and 'non disabled' will be used, along with descriptors of corporeality and physicality such as 'diverse', 'different', and 'normate and non-normate'. The

latter terms were created by disability scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson and will be discussed, along with the use of the word ‘disability’, in Chapter Two when these concepts will be considered in greater depth. A brief history of the politicization of disability will be considered, along with a critical analysis of the historical influences that have contributed to the marginalization of dancers with disabilities in the world of professional dance performance.

Secondly, three dance performances will be critically examined in Chapters Three, Four and Five, in order to investigate the potential for dance to be a vehicle for initiating changed perceptions of disability. These works were chosen because they each have specific relevance to different aspects of dance performance that is inclusive of different physicalities. Chapter Three will focus on *GIMP* (2009) choreographed by Heidi Latsky, Chapter Four examines *Diagnosis of A Faun* (2009) choreographed by Tamar Rogoff, and Chapter Five considers choreographer Petra Kupperts’ work *water burns sun* (2009). The critical analyses of these works will contextualize each one with regard to disability identity and different cultural perceptions of diversity.

Throughout these three chapters, there are several constituents that are being considered: the potential experience of the viewer, the content of the choreography in relation to diversity and inclusion, and the potential contained in the works for facilitating change. Finding an existing methodology of dance analysis that would encompass all these constituents proved to be impossible as no existing form of dance analysis makes specific reference to the inclusion of dancers with disabilities. The methodology which subsequently evolved is comprised of several elements in order to address these various constituents. An approach generally informed by the principles of Rudolph Laban’s<sup>iii</sup> movement analysis will be used in the descriptive passages where the focus is on the choreographic material of the works. Reference will be made to the implicit perceptions of disability as engendered within the dance performance through the choice of movement vocabulary used, and the choreographic intent

contained, within each work. These perceptions will be supported by relating them to existing theorizing contained in scholarly works within both disability studies and performance studies. Petra Kuppers and Ann Cooper Albright are two academics whose work encompasses both Disability Studies and Performance Studies. Their work has informed this methodology in relation to disabled dancers on stage, and methodological connections to the theoretical stances of each of these academics are made throughout Chapters Two to Five.

Within performance studies, the tenets expounded by academic Susan Leigh Foster (2001) have been adapted, particularly her approach to reading dance that incorporates difference and marginalization as demonstrated in her readings of choreographers and dancers Arnie Zane and Bill T Jones' works. She considers their choreography in which 'sensitivity, egalitarian sharing of space and weight might form a foundation for all social interaction' (2001:428).

The potential experience of the viewer in relation to disability will be critiqued in light of existing neurobiological research. As a result, the dance analysis contained within this thesis comprises of a cluster of apparently unrelated theoretical approaches, which have been drawn together in order to meet the needs of an analysis that recognizes the presence of each of the constituents listed. As this thesis concentrates on pre-linguistic, embodied and relational modes of communicating through dance, methodologies that focus purely on a semiological or textual approach were considered inappropriate. Chapter Six will consider in depth how dance performance can be theorized within a framework of neurobiology. Growing knowledge in this field provides intriguing possibilities for new theory that may provide a strong rationale for dance performance as a medium for changing societal perceptions of disability. Personal experience and anecdotal evidence have long supported the notion of dance as transformative. Recent developments in neurobiology now offer the possibility of creating a new understanding that goes beyond the personal or anecdotal, to a more solid theoretical base.

This growing area of scientific research will be used in order to gain insight into both the elements of dance performance that may influence perceptions of disability, as well as the experience of the viewer when looking at dance that includes disabled dancers. This thesis does not aim to investigate audience responses in direct relation to each specific performance discussed, but rather explores a theoretical approach to potential responses based on neurobiological knowledge of interpersonal relationships. Viewers' responses are of course complex and varied, depending on an interweaving of each individual's prior experience and internalized perceptions of disability, and the performance viewed. An audience cannot be considered as a homogenous group. The three performances which form the core of this critical enquiry lend themselves to being understood in an evolutionary manner, reflecting three distinct stages of how physical diversity is perceived. This will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapters at both a societal level and as a means of attempting to create a framework for theorizing individual viewer responses. Neurobiology provides a potential understanding of the social and emotional mechanisms that are engaged when viewing dance performance that includes dancers with diverse physicalities, corresponding to each of the three evolutionary stages. This interconnection of an understanding of disability that is inherently contained within a performance itself, along with each individual's existing perceptions of disability and received notions of disability as communicated by the performance, creates the possibility of considering viewers' responses as a multi layered continuum rather than a standardized entity. This notion will be further developed in the ensuing chapters.

## **1.2 Dance and disability: points of departure**

The marginalization of the disabled body within western society has only relatively recently been questioned and there is a vital need to find solutions that will bring about a more inclusive ethos (Snyder and Mitchell, 2006). The aim of this research is to examine dance performance

as a possible means of meeting that need. Inclusion through the art of dance is the underlying interest that initiated this study and the apparent duality in the role of dance, as both an indicator of societal values and as a vehicle for change, was the starting point. It allowed for an approach to the subject that would recognize existing beliefs as well as identifying the potential for change, thereby perhaps bridging the space between the abstract notion of inclusion and its actual realization.

As dance is one of the visual arts, dance performance contains the fundamental aspects of ‘seeing’ and ‘being seen’ that are also major defining elements in the categorization of people with disabilities (Garland Thomson, 2009). The exclusion of people with disabilities from many aspects of social interaction has the effect of making disability invisible on one hand, diverted away from the flow of everyday living, while on the other hand disability becomes hypervisible, as ordinary situations have to be negotiated in an extraordinary way. As Linton says, a flight of steps that cannot be accessed reduces her presence to a lesser state. She is the invisible person who has to find another way to enter, usually by an out of the way side entrance intended for a very different purpose. Disabled dancer Judith Smith of *Axis*, San Francisco, tells of many occasions when access to the stage area of a venue involved using goods entrances, and industrial lifts not designed for people but for unwieldy pieces of equipment (private conversation, 2006). In some places, even this means of reaching the stage was not accessible and both herself and her wheelchair had to be manually lifted and carried by stagehands, turning her negotiation of her environment into a situation of hypervisibility, dependent upon the actions of others that in turn rendered her passive and without agency. The steps at Columbia, the industrial lift at the theatre, the alternative ‘solitary and difficult route’ (Linton 2007:57) all contain a subtext that denies the valid, visible presence of someone with a disability, reducing the person to an objectified presence that is seen as ‘other’, not as an equal partner in the interpersonal relationships that build together to create community.

A large proportion of existing research into the sociology of the body within dance studies has been focussed on considering the dancing body as cultural text, often neglecting, paradoxically, the element of human performance (Turner, 2008:218). For the creation of this new theoretical approach to changing societal perceptions of disability, it is necessary to critically explore the existing theoretical stances that inform how society looks at disabled bodies, both in the wider context of everyday life and in the microcosm of dance performance. Before embarking on this exploration, a brief overview of the emergence of the genre ‘integrated dance’ in the context of twentieth century theatre dance will be considered.

The word ‘integrated’ has become the accepted means of describing a dance company that includes both non disabled and disabled dancers. From the Latin *integrare* (to make whole), the word implies an approach to dance that would be inclusive of all, regardless of differences in embodiment, but this is not the case. In practice, the use of the label only serves to marginalize and differentiate integrated dance, so it could be considered somewhat a misnomer.

Historically, since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, the disabled body has been marginalized and excluded from society (Snyder and Mitchell, 2006) and if dance is understood to be a conduit for the expression and reinforcement of societal values, the exclusion of the disabled body from dance as an art form until very recently, has upheld this value system. In this light, integrated dance can be seen as a move towards the inclusion of those with disabilities into mainstream acceptance, a redefining of the normative through artistic expression. Integrated Dance has become established as a genre that is inclusive of both non-disabled and disabled corporealities at all levels, up to and including professional dance performance. In its widest context, integrated dance can encompass physical, sensory and intellectual ways of being in the world that are considered to be outside the normative, and

therefore categorized as disabled. As this is too broad a spectrum for consideration within this thesis, the focus here is on physical disability.

The genre of integrated dance is highly ambiguous and is very much a grey area both in the societal sense and in the field of academic research. There are no clear cut boundaries within which it can be contained, and it has generally been perceived as either therapeutic, or a community based exercise in inclusion, rather than a valid form of professional theatre dance (Benjamin, 2002). Artists with physical disabilities, no matter which area of the arts they are active in, are often defined by their disabilities rather than their artistic talents and this gave rise to the social construct 'Disability Arts', under which integrated dance has often been placed (Cooper Albright, 1997). This has the effect of being ultimately disempowering, minimizing the artistic endeavours of individuals under a label that segregates on the basis of corporeality<sup>iv</sup>.

Most writing concerning integrated dance that is currently available is more closely allied to the field of Disability Studies and this creates limitations to some extent, as the emphasis tends to be more on inclusion and critical discourse on corporealities, rather than a treatment of integrated dance as an art form. As a result, finding sources directly related to integrated dance performance, for the initial development of this study, has been somewhat difficult. A great deal of the information available has been obtained through internet sources as there is not yet enough interest in or demand for works in this genre to have been published in more traditional forms. Personal contact with integrated dance practitioners in both Europe and America also provided a valuable source that informed the development of this work.



### **1.3 The legitimate dancing body – shifting the boundaries**

Historically, western theatre dance had been based on the construct of the sylph, a notion that will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter. In recent decades, there has been a shift within modern/post-modern dance towards a changed perception of the body type that can be accepted as a dancer, as well as a shift in perception of what constitutes dance. Until the latter part of the twentieth century, western theatre dance tended to exclude all but the most able by setting very restrictive parameters in relation to the ideal physique. Only those with specific physical traits were accepted to receive vocational dance training, a training that was usually based on a codified movement vocabulary, ballet being the most dominant (Au, 2002). These restrictive parameters were so exclusionary that a large proportion of non-disabled people could not ever hope to reach the physical ideal required.

In recent decades, there has been a shift within modern/post-modern dance towards a more realistic perception of the body type that can be accepted as a dancer as well as a shift in perception of what constitutes dance. Early in the twentieth century, dancer Isadora Duncan challenged existing expectations of the dance audience, refocussing the objectifying male gaze. Her dance defied the conventions of the time, creating an immediacy that was at odds with the expectations of the spectator who was used to distancing and idealizing the performer (Daly, 2001). In the 1960s, another major shift occurred when dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainer issued her 'NO' manifesto (1974:51) as an agenda statement for the Judson Dance Group in 1965. Again, her aim was to fracture the objectifying male gaze by changing the focus. Dance scholar, Ann Cooper Albright states, 'Rainer was trying to demystify the female dancing body and refuse the traditional position of the dancer as an object of desire' (1997:20). Rainer introduced pedestrian movement into performance which challenged the existing aesthetic of virtuosity and the accepted view that professional dance was confined to a few specific technique-based styles. As these styles had evolved in a time when all professional

dancers were non-disabled, they generally did not offer a movement vocabulary that could be directly applied to the disabled body. Pedestrian (unfounded) movement and contact improvisation both supplied an entry point into professional dance for differing corporealities because there was no single, uniform notion of the type of body needed to use these movement vocabularies.

Choreographers such as Mark Morris started to favour bodies that expressed the effort and stress involved in movement, or bodies that could realize the vision of the choreographer without being limited by the need for uniformity in physical appearance, as is expected in the classical corps de ballet (Acocella, 1994). This perception of the need for uniformity in physical appearance is one facet of the western social construct, the able body, which provides the measure against which all bodies are compared to assess their acceptability within the parameters of what is considered 'normal'. Social acceptance or exclusion is defined by the corporeality of the individual. The presence of the disabled body onstage, claiming the role of dancer, provokes responses that vary widely, reflecting the changing perceptions of the audience and consequently, those of the culture in which the performance takes place. Isadora Duncan and Yvonne Rainer were both placed at the periphery of western theatre dance when they first introduced their new approaches to dance, yet now they hold the position of icons because of their innovative work.

The introduction of pedestrian movement and contact improvisation<sup>v</sup> into performance in the 1970s challenged the existing aesthetic of virtuosity and the accepted view that professional dance was confined to a few specific technique-based styles. As these technique-based styles had evolved at a time when practically all professional dancers were able-bodied, they generally did not offer a movement vocabulary that could be directly applied to the disabled body. Attempts to do so only led to negative comparisons, and the perception that the disabled dancer's performance was merely an approximation of the 'real thing', an attempt to

define the transgressive body in terms of the normative (Kuppers, 2003). As Cooper Albright states: 'normalizing the disabled body doesn't serve to break down these dichotomies of social difference, it merely disguises them with an alternative discourse' (1997:63).

The development of these new movement vocabularies supplied an entry point into professional dance for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, differing corporealities were unremarkable because there was no single, uniform notion of the type of body needed to use these vocabularies, and secondly, there was a fluidity to the vocabularies, they were not rigidly codified systems of movement as had previously dominated western theatre dance (Au, 2002, Cohen Bull, 2001). The emphasis began to shift from the external, objectifiable view of the dancing body to the internal, subjective experience of the dancer that could be communicated to the viewer. But even with such a fundamental change in viewpoint that permitted the not so 'sylph-like' dancer to be considered acceptable in certain dance companies, the professional dance world was still dominated by the culturally prescribed body, the body that meets the requirements of what is readily identified as a dancer (Cooper Albright, 1997). Until the latter half of the twentieth century, the inclusion of the disabled body within the art of dance had nearly always been confined to the realm of therapy. This therapeutic approach mirrored the medical model's perception of disability which saw dance as a means of intervention, a vehicle for the achievement of other goals within the management and rehabilitation of the client (Benjamin, 2002). In more recent times, community dance provided an entry point for those with disabilities, again usually with an underlying therapeutic interpretation of inclusion that provided a sense of 'charitable giving' for the non-disabled participants, who tended to see their role as supporting and enabling (ibid.).

Philosophical discourse has always been facilitated by the arts, and the emergence of integrated dance (dance that is inclusive of dancers both with and without disabilities) appeared to be a fundamental means of creating an inclusive ethos, by bridging the space

between the abstract notion of inclusion and its actual realization. The creation of integrated dance came about in the 1970s, at a time when social justice and equality were being sought by marginalized groups and the disability rights movement was emerging in both the UK and the USA. As the genre developed over the next decade, integrated dance began to make the shift from community based activities to professional dance performance. Companies such as *Axis* in San Francisco and *CandoCo* in London were formed, and began to produce works with a disability focus, highlighting the social and political issues inherent in living within a norm-based society. Unfortunately, as there was no existing structure to provide training for dancers with differently abled bodies, the physically disabled dancer was often untrained, the works produced often lacked artistic rigour and although generally well received by sympathetic audiences, they were still not considered worthy of serious attention within mainstream professional dance. (Benjamin, 2002).

This has been an issue within integrated dance since its inception and has led to the interpretation of this form of dance as freak show performance, (which is integral to, and will be discussed in depth, in Chapter Three) and victim art, which will be discussed in greater detail at a later stage in this chapter, as well as the apparently more politically correct placement of the disabled dancer as 'heroic' and therefore outside the critical evaluation criteria reserved for non disabled dancers. In integrated dance performance, the presence of non disabled dancers can sometimes be perceived as taking on the 'mediator' role, identifiable as and identifying with what Garland Thompson calls the normate, 'the veiled subject position of the cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries' (1997:8). The mediator role has long been associated with disability, as seen in the freak show pitchman attracting the crowd with promises of the exotic and the monstrous, or the doctor diminishing the humanity of the patient to a mere exposition of bodily anomaly in order to inform assembled students (Kuppers, 2003). In dance

performance where there is a lack of artistic rigour, the non disabled dancer runs the risk of becoming the mediator. This mediating role is located alongside the viewer, making the disabled dancer become hypervisible in terms of her disability rather than her dance. Education and training are vital components in order to go beyond this point and to bring dancers of different abilities into positions of privilege, status and power from where change can be instigated, as Mitchell and Snyder state:

To move from the passive position of the silenced object of discourse in the cultural locations of disability to the active position of producer of knowledge about the social, political and phenomenological aspects of disability destabilizes any number of objectifying practices. (2006:203)

The ableist, ‘mediator’ approach to integrated dance is one such objectifying practice that began to be questioned and challenged as disability activism began to emerge in both Europe and America from the 1970s onwards. During this era, other groups marginalized by western society had begun to form organized movements in order to fight for recognition and acceptance within existing societal boundaries, for example the Civil Rights Movement in America. The Disability Movement emerged, based on a new understanding of disability as a social construct, where the focus was no longer on subjective embodiment but on the environments that uphold exclusion (Shakespeare, 2006). The design and construction of those environments, both physical and social, favoured the able body and effectively prevented the disabled body from full participation. This growing sense of agency that was infiltrating many sectors of marginalized people and dance practice began to move out of the realm of the therapeutic. Consequently, integrated dance companies began to emerge in the last two decades of the twentieth century, reflecting the desire for inclusion at all levels of social discourse. This reflected the ethos of the time when marginalized groups were creating intersections of political, social and artistic integration which had the potential to bring about change (Linton, 2007). There was a pressing need to question the idealized image of the dancing body as the existing parameters were still too narrow. Specific physical attributes did not necessarily imply

virtuosity. The disabled body became the ideal site for challenging existing notions and provided a vehicle for attempting to broaden the parameters that defined dance. Two specific dance companies epitomize the transition from integrated dance as a therapeutic endeavour, to dance as a legitimate site for professional performance, and the emergence of these two companies will now be considered.

#### **1.4 Integrated dance: the birth of professional status**

*Axis* and *CandoCo* both came into existence at a time when theatre dance had gone through an upheaval which resulted in the broadening of perceptions relating to the dancing body. However, these changes were still within the confines of the ‘able’ body, there was still no place for a body that was perceived as incomplete or damaged. *Axis* and *CandoCo* were announcing the presence of a different embodiment and confronting the limitations placed upon them by the professional dance world. Both companies wanted to place themselves within mainstream professional dance, not on the periphery within the categories reserved for community and therapeutic dance.

*Axis* and *CandoCo* were chosen as representative of the genre because they are both recognized as being leaders in the field of professional integrated companies. They are both performance based but also with a strong educational programme that serves to inform the general public on integrated dance and also to provide a potential pool of dancers who have training in the art form. Geographically, both companies are situated in large metropolitan cities with an existing dance culture that encompasses all forms of the art and provides an educated and critical audience. Both companies began at a time when new approaches to dance, that no longer espoused virtuosic, technique driven styles, had moved from the periphery of the art form to mainstream performance.

### **1.5 Axis and CandoCo: the early years**

Judith Smith of *Axis* had no formal dance training before the accident that led to her disability. A move to California in her mid-twenties brought her into contact with a Civil and Disability Rights culture that was having a direct impact on the community in which she now lived. The Independent Living movement, that had arisen from the Disability Rights campaign in California during the late 1970s and early 1980s, had provided fertile ground for the growth of many community based activities that centred on inclusion and integration. Educator and choreographer, Thais Mazur, had begun a creative movement group for women in wheelchairs and Smith was invited to join them through meeting Mazur at an integrated martial arts class. Some members of this creative movement group, together with other members of the martial arts class, formed the core from which *Axis* developed.

Dance Brigade, a community based feminist performing arts company, provided a platform for *Axis*' early public performances. Their first performance took place in 1988 at The Dance Brigade's 'Furious Feet Festival of Social Change' This led to an invitation to join Dance Brigade's *Revolutionary Nutcracker Sweetie* (1991), a new approach to the classic Christmas tale performed by a diverse cast that represented a wide spectrum of disability and marginalization.

Membership of the company was not restricted by the necessity of previous dance training, the inclusive ethos at the time meant that anyone with a high level of commitment would not be turned away. Professional dance training for people with disabilities was not an option in the late eighties and in fact, this element of dance training is still seriously underdeveloped to the present day. Judith Smith was very much aware of the limitations placed on the company by lack of vocational training during the early years. When interviewed by dance critic Rita Felciano, she recalled that the company was given a standing ovation at the end of its first performance. Smith's concern was that the applause could have been merely for

the fact that some of the dancers were disabled rather than an appreciation of the performance per se and she was very conscious that the company was given recognition before there was enough artistic development to produce work of a calibre that she desired. She stated: ‘because of the novelty, integrated companies sometimes get recognition before the artistic level is really there. I think that happened with *Axis*’ (Felciano, 2002). At the time, there was confusion over whether the work was therapy or performance. When interviewed by the author (See Appendix A) Smith recalled that a consultant, who had been a member of an Arts Council panel for making funding decisions, reported that this confusion was present when a funding application by *Axis* was being considered. The lack of opportunity for vocational training exacerbated this problem of how integrated dance should be categorized. Unless a level of expertise that reflected artistic rigour could be demonstrated, it was bound to be kept within the domains of either therapy or community dance. This reflects the ethos of the company at its foundation, which was very much issue driven and community based rather than pursuing the achievement of artistic excellence.

Lack of funding and suitable rehearsal space hindered the development of the company at this time and it was only through the dedication of the core group, Smith, Mazur, and Bonnie Lewcowicz, (another member of Mazur’s women’s dance group) that the company survived. The limitations placed on the company were reflected in the location of performances from 1988 until 1992. All performances took place in the relatively small geographical space of San Francisco and its environs, and they were often linked with disability rights events, such as the Disability Arts and Culture Fair, Berkeley, (1990), Dancing in Diversity Festival, Santa Rosa, (1991), and the Motivity Center Benefit, San Rafael, (1991). In 1992, the company began to branch out from this limited base and performed at Dance Umbrella’s Aerial Dance Festival in Boston. There was also a collaboration in the same year with another integrated dance group, *Mobiaki*, in Köln, Germany. *Axis* was beginning to become known in the disability arts sector



both nationally and internationally, and was also beginning to perform outside this sector, widening its audience and exposing more people to the experience of viewing integrated dance. The lack of artistic excellence continued to be a problem and at that time, there was no solution on offer. Choreographic decisions were made on a 'committee' basis, with every member of the company having equal input. None of the members had any formal choreographic training and this was very much apparent in the quality of the work.

Dancer Stephanie McGlynn joined the company in 1995. Her dance training had its roots in German 'Elementarer Tanz', a modern dance style which had developed from the work of Rudolph Laban and Mary Wigman. She studied Authentic Movement in California and through the melding of these two dance styles, she brought a fresh dance and choreographic influence into the company. Nicole Richter, who had studied Laban technique and had previously worked with *CandoCo*, joined the company shortly after, bringing further professional expertise into the company. Integrated dance as performed by *Axis* was slowly beginning to emerge as an art form in its own right rather than being fixed within therapeutic or community dance.

Meanwhile in London, a personal narrative very similar to that of Judith Smith was unfolding. Celeste Dandeker had been dancing with the London Contemporary Dance Theatre in 1973 when an accident onstage left her with a serious spinal injury resulting in paralysis. Dandeker had received her professional dance training at the London School of Contemporary Dance. This school was founded in 1968 by Robin Howard and the Martha Graham trained choreographer, Robert Cohan, and was known for its openness to experimental work within the world of dance in Britain. Throughout Britain, there had been huge developments in the field of dance education and community dance in the seventies and eighties, which led to the formation of several dance companies that had an inclusive ethos. However, none of these companies had managed to make the transition from community dance to professional dance.

Dandeker's changed physicality caused her to avoid any direct performance involvement in the world of dance until choreographer and former classmate Darshan Singh-Bhuller persuaded her to take part in a film he was making for BBC2's series *10x10*, screened in 1991. This film, entitled *The Fall*, is an enigmatic study of Dandeker which doesn't provide a clear narrative related to her embodiment, but when it is coupled with a knowledge of her personal history, it can be interpreted on differing levels that offer a multiplicity of stories depending upon the culturally coded readings of the viewer. There is no definitive 'truth' in the film, 'what is witnessed is the impossibility of narrative emerging out of the encounter with 'other' physicality. Disability becomes unknown.' (Kuppers, 2003:102). Kuppers' statement echoes Albright's notion of the stage being an unruly space where previously held assumptions are thrown into disarray. This film can be interpreted as setting the scene for Dandeker's reinvolvement with dance. Her inner drive was to rediscover a movement potential within her own body that would encompass her changed physicality, without compromising the artistry and aesthetic value that imbued her dance prior to the accident that had dislocated her career. In this aspect, a fundamental difference existed between *Axis* and *CandoCo*. Dandeker approached the formation of a company as a trained dancer whose driving force was dance rather than the social and political issues surrounding disability (See Appendix C). She was not interested in promoting a disability ethic and she certainly didn't want to appeal to a 'sympathetic' audience. Dandeker wanted her dance to achieve artistic excellence and to be critically viewed in this light. Artistic integrity was the driving force behind her explorations in a new movement vocabulary (ibid.). It was vital to her artistic integrity that her dance was not neatly labelled, placed alongside other disability arts and given cultural recognition as being an approximation of dance performed by an incomplete, damaged body. The unknowability of her corporeality would defy categorization within the existing parameters that contained dance, making it possible for new parameters to be created.

Following the making of the film, Dandeker began a collaboration with Adam Benjamin, a Tai Ch'i teacher who had trained in dance and visual arts. Benjamin was interested in exploring pedestrian (unfound) movement as a dance language for differently abled bodies. He began working with Dandeker and between them they found 'inherent choreographic art in Celeste's natural body movements.' (Benjamin, cited in Newham, 1999:120).

The perception of the disabled dancer as transcending the limitations of a body that was perceived as incomplete or damaged, fed into the popular interpretation of disability as being something that needed to be fixed in order to mirror the norm as closely as possible (Cooper Albright, 1997). Benjamin was very aware of the pitfalls surrounding this sympathetic approach to integrated dance and he recognized that many other integrated groups had implicitly accepted these limitations through lack of artistic integrity. He believed that producing second rate work was one of 'the greatest disservices that is continually perpetrated by well-meaning people in the arts and education' (Benjamin, 1993:43). A lack of choreographic communication between dancers often resulted in disabled dancers being little more than props for the trained non disabled dancers, or in those non disabled dancers minimizing their talent in the mistaken belief that they were being considerate to the disabled dancers within the group. The resulting work lacked merit and inevitably was not of a calibre to be rated alongside other forms of professional dance. Benjamin recognised that community and education projects provided a starting point, but 'the professional performer requires training, discipline, determination and above all...talent.' (Benjamin, 1993:43).

### **1.6 Professional status and choreographic intent**

Both *Axis* and *CandoCo* were aware of the potential artistic limitations within their companies that arose from the difficulties caused by lack of proper, structured training and lack of clear choreographic direction. *CandoCo* had addressed the choreographic problem from the

outset by commissioning works from outside choreographers almost as soon as the company had been formed. This was made possible by the funding that had been given to the company through government agencies supporting integration (see interview with Celeste Dandeker, Appendix C). *Axis* was not as fortunate and didn't receive enough financial support to enable them to develop in this way. It placed the company in the position of having to rely mainly on their own artistic resources in creating new material with only occasional input from commissioned choreographers. As the majority of members were still focussing on creating a platform for highlighting social issues, artistry took second place. This was the most influential factor in slowing down the perception of *Axis* as a mainstream contemporary company until the late 1990s when a change of artistic control within the company opened the way for outside choreographic influence.

The commissioning of works by choreographers from outside the companies served a dual purpose. Firstly, it made demands on the dancers by introducing different movement vocabularies and different expectations on the part of the choreographer. It upheld the view that the unifying principle of the company was artistic growth and development. Secondly, it provided an existing reference point for the viewer who was unfamiliar or uncomfortable with integrated dance. Integrated dance could be more easily accessed and understood if placed within a framework created by the choreographers' previous work with non disabled companies. This is a somewhat ambiguous benefit however, as it presupposes an acceptance of integrated dance as a variation of existing forms of dance rather than a new form, independent of any attachments. Inevitably, such attachments can only hold integrated dance as a reflection of the real thing, an attempt to emulate rather than create.

The work of choreographer Victoria Marks provides useful insights into the development of the choreographic process over time as related to integrated dance. Marks choreographed for *CandoCo* in its very early days in 1992. She has also choreographed for

*Axis* as recently as April, 2013<sup>vi</sup>, when she was commissioned to create a work for their current twenty fifth anniversary season. Marks was head of the choreography programme at the London School of Contemporary Dance in 1992, when she was asked by film maker Margaret Williams to collaborate in creating a dance for camera based on disability, performed by *CandoCo*. During an interview with Marks, (see Appendix B), she outlined her approach to the creation of the work and the underlying rationale. Initially, she asked the dancers to teach her how they moved and also asked them how they perceived themselves. The dancers brought up the issue of invisibility, how their presence was negated by the averted gaze of the other. Marks felt that she needed to create a work that would affirm their presence, she wanted it to be provocative, because she was aware of the influencing power of a dance work that would be broadcast on national television. Her hope was that in one thirteen minute viewing, there would be an opportunity to change the representation of disability, her aim being to uncover each dancer's unique movement style as she had no desire to replicate movement in order to create a uniform body. (Appendix B). During filming, Williams and Marks shot a camera angle through the spokes of a wheelchair. When viewing the film footage later that day, everybody intensely disliked the image that was created and felt it played into the stereotyped vision of the 'cripple'. The dancers asked for images to be kept neutral and it was at this point that Marks realized that there is no such thing as a neutral image, and this is what spurred her on to create a work that would shift viewers' perspectives of disability. In dealing with the problem of invisibility, she attempted to undo the conventional ideas surrounding empowerment by working with a pseudo-tango vocabulary that depicted sensuality, a topic usually hidden when dealing with disability (Kuppers, 2003). Williams and Marks wanted to create a work that would provoke people into confronting their prejudices and embarrassment. The resulting film, *Outside In*, was screened in January, 1995 and went on to become one of the BBC's most successful music and arts films, in terms of the number of awards it received. To a certain

extent, the motivation behind the making of this film apparently contradicted Dandeker's aim to focus on dance rather than dealing with disability issues. However, Marks' belief that there is no neutral position in performance, or in the recording of that performance, meant that to her, creating dance and dealing with disability issues were not in this case mutually exclusive.

Over the years, Marks' focus has shifted from creating a socio-political statement through the medium of dance, to exploring the movement potential of the dancers themselves as a means of creating new work. The humanity of the dancers and the relationships that could be created on stage at an interpersonal level had superseded the approach to choreography that promoted a disability ethic.

Both *Axis* and *Candoco* are among the very few integrated dance companies internationally that have managed to survive the transition from a socio-politically driven or community focussed base, to positioning themselves at what could arguably be considered the periphery of mainstream dance. At the same time that both companies were beginning the process of making that transition, a pivotal occurrence was taking place in New York, where a heated debate arose concerning the validity of choreography that dealt with social or political issues. This was of fundamental importance to the positioning of integrated dance within the international dance community, and the validity of differently abled bodies taking their place on stage as dancers.

### **1.7 The 'victim art' problem**

The choice of choreographic material that dealt with minority rights issues gave rise to criticism, not only of the quality of the dance itself, but of the message it contained. This criticism was also extended to the performers of dance who were clearly members of a minority group, such as people with disabilities. Because the disabled body transgressed the boundaries of what was then acceptable as a dancing body, it was seen as an affront to the aesthetic

sensibilities of certain dance critics and reviewers and was consequently labelled ‘victim art’, implying that it was appealing to the viewer to have a sympathetic gaze outside the realms of criticism that governed every other form of theatre dance (Cooper Albright, 1997).

*Axis* had already experienced this in their first performance as previously mentioned and *CandoCo* was very much aware that this interpretation of its performance would be the inevitable consequence of work that lacked artistic integrity. Even though *CandoCo* strived to produce work that equalled that of any other contemporary dance company, Benjamin noted that their performances ‘left some more formal dance critics cold, and indeed we continue to tread this deliciously uncertain ground between innovation and offence’ (Benjamin, 1993:42). His choice of the word ‘offence’ is interesting, in that it reflects his own positioning within the dance world at that time. Despite his awareness of the social constructs that attempted to contain and reduce integrated dance to a lesser art form, he still implicitly placed himself within those boundaries by his choice of word which implies an acceptance of the notion that offence can be given by placing a disabled body on the stage.

The most publicized example of ‘treading this deliciously uncertain ground’ was New York dance critic Arlene Croce’s non-review of a performance of choreographer Bill T. Jones’ work *Still/Here* (New York, 1994). The article which appeared in the *New Yorker* magazine (1994/5:54-60), epitomized the approach to integrated dance as victim art, a popularly held view in America at the time. Jones had created a work that was based on a study of mortality and as part of the performance, images of people with terminal illnesses were projected onto a backdrop along with a sound track of their voices. It was widely understood to be focussing on the Aids epidemic that was affecting the arts community throughout America although Jones himself stated that it was concerned with the much wider issue of mortality, not necessarily confined to death through Aids related illness. Croce refused to actually see or review the performance. The article that she subsequently wrote created a level

of debate that ultimately raised the profile of the genre, including integrated dance, that could be perceived as ‘victim art’. Croce very clearly placed victim art outside the realms of ‘high’ art and as such, she believed it did not warrant serious consideration on an aesthetic level. The very fact that she attempted to delineate ‘high’ art caused people to question their preconceptions and to respond to Croce through the letters page of the *New Yorker* as well as in articles in other publications, thus extending the effect of the initial article in raising awareness of the issues involved. Croce stated that in her role as dance critic she had learned to:

avoid dancers with obvious problems – overweight dancers old dancers, dancers with sickled feet or dancers with physical deformities....performers, in short, who make out of victimhood victim art. 1994/5:55

In popularizing the label ‘victim art’, Croce provided a means of categorizing integrated dance for those who found it difficult to adjust their concept of dance to include an embodiment other than western theatre’s highly stylized notion of the sylph. Through her own words, ‘but we have (also) created an art with no power of transcendence’ (1994:59), Croce firmly places herself within very clearly defined boundaries that negate anything but the classical notion of dance that she considers ‘high’ art. It could be argued that this power of transcendence was still central to the western notion of dance at that time, glorifying the sylph and ignoring the existence of any embodiment that did not conform to it, as well as portraying human suffering in a stylized, performative manner, reality not being an acceptable mode of expression. Croce interpreted Jones’ work as a form of tyranny imposed upon the audience, demanding sympathy and coercing the viewer into a relationship that must acknowledge the reality of their suffering. Joyce Carol Oates, writer and critic, pointed out in her response to Croce, ‘To demand that victimized persons transcend their pain in order to make audiences feel good is another kind of tyranny’ (Oates, 1995). This controversy epitomized the state of integrated dance during the early to mid nineties when existing standpoints were being



challenged. Oates goes on to criticize those critics who uphold Croce's views: 'the censorious-conservative impulse remains: to define art, to appropriate art, to 'protect' art from apparent incursions of disorder, even by the artists themselves' (ibid.). Disabled dancers with 'disordered' bodies did not fit into an understanding of art that depended upon such strict delineation. Modernist thinking, as reflected in Croce's words, depended upon acceptance of boundaries between 'high' and 'low' art. Art was accepted as a reflection of the cultural values that created the clear delineations upholding a social hierarchy that was now coming into question. Croce believed that government funding supported socially useful art at the expense of aesthetic integrity. The position of integrated companies in America, in relation to mainstream contemporary companies, was compromised by the negative influence of the victim art debate. The artistic integrity that *Axis* sought was only beginning to emerge and the company was not in a strong enough position aesthetically to withstand the compartmentalization that ensued. This was exacerbated by the fact that they had emphasized the disability issues in their performance rather than artistic endeavour. Very few critics were willing to review their work outside the confines of disability art until relatively recently.

Meanwhile, the post modernist approach to performance was blurring the distinctions between 'high' and 'low' art, and upholding the position that the two were not mutually exclusive. Academic Carol Martin states: 'The disintegration of aesthetic dichotomies and boundaries such as 'high' and 'low' is part of the dissolution of modernism.' (1996:332). Martin goes on to state that classical western aesthetics are based on maintaining distance between the performer and the viewer; the performer is in a representational role and so the viewer is protected from direct involvement with the performer. The post modern aesthetic, however, creates overlaps and incursions, blurring the distinctions between performer and viewer by displaying the real. It creates an element of participation by the viewer. Martin states:

the authenticity, intentionality, self-centred subjectivity, and personal identity of both the performers and the spectators are thrown open to re-examination. 1996:332

This post modern approach can to some extent explain the slightly different interpretation given to victim art in Britain and Europe. Because disability rights issues had not received the same amount of exposure as in America and the movement had not been as militant, the response to disability arts was much more benign. Britain continued to see the disabled body as devalued. Specific disability was perceived as being globally incapacitating to the individual which resulted in normal achievements being interpreted as extraordinary or courageous.

The emergence of the disabled body as dancer threatened to transgress existing boundaries and created a void that needed to be filled by some form of structure within which this transgression could be accommodated. While the disabled body was contained within the culturally prescribed limits of therapeutic/community dance, it didn't require any adjustment to prevailing value systems; but now a new structure had to be created to contain the transgressive body in order to maintain the status quo and so the 'heroic' dancer, overcoming personal tragedy, became that structure. Physical limitations were perceived as being transcended in a manner that evoked a sympathetic and admiring response from the viewer, rather than the critical response normally given to any other dance performance. The post modern threat of blurred boundaries could be circumvented by taking this stance.

Ann Cooper Albright considers this perception of the disabled dancer as being 'heroic', as indicative of a basic problem contained within integrated companies themselves. She believes that despite their intention to create a new approach to dance, most integrated companies continue to apply the binary logic that is present in western culture, that continues to see the able, ideal body as the norm and the disabled body as attempting to replicate that ideal (1997). *CandoCo* and *Axis* have both experienced the 'heroic' interpretation of their work. It provides a 'comfort zone' for viewer and critic alike that precludes a more honestly critical

evaluation of each company, and allows for the potential undermining of their efforts to be included within the spectrum of western professional dance.

### **1.8 Integration/Disintegration**

From the early nineties onward, dancer and educator Adam Benjamin had been highlighting the need to change perceptions that uphold the desire for conformity in dance. He believed that dance had lost touch with a corporeality grounded in reality, and as a result, this had influenced the development of *CandoCo* coming into the twenty first century (in conversation with the author, August, 2004). He felt that a pattern was emerging whereby the disabled dancers of the company were being chosen for athleticism and virtuosity that mirrored as closely as possible the physical abilities of the able dancers. Benjamin felt that this attempt to homogenize the company was compromising artistic integrity. On a positive note, he said ‘the athletic, able, disabled dancer serves to dispel the notion of the disabled person as victim’ (ibid.) but he went on to point out that this diminishes the artistry that can be achieved within the company because the issues of connection on a human level become less evident and ‘it takes away the necessity for the choreographer to be poet, visionary, weaver, creator’ (ibid.). Attempts to create a company that is almost like any other non disabled company is, in effect, denying the diversity of physicalities that come under the term ‘disabled’. During the company’s early days, the driving force behind its growth was the need to keep redefining dance by making a connection between disparate lives. Now the emphasis was on minimizing these differences and aspiring to the norm, which is an implicit acceptance of the societal hierarchy that excludes the disabled body.

It could be argued that this pattern has continued over recent years, and a similar process of development appears to be taking place in *Axis* also. To take *CandoCo*’s current position in relation to the ‘able’ disabled body as dancer, a situation seems to be arising in

which rather than integration, where all parts necessary to make a whole are present, there seems to be a disintegration, a removal of parts that are necessary to make a whole. The removal of the disabled body by trying to mirror the norm as closely as possible is a denial of the integrative process. The disabled body can be placed nowhere other than outside the boundaries that describe the norm when that norm is based on the idealized able body. To attempt otherwise is a negation of the reality of other corporealities. The heroic dancer is not an acceptable means of inclusion because of these implications. It may be that the disabled body can be interpreted as grotesque<sup>vii</sup>, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word, rather than heroic, and it is now necessary to look to the notion of embodiment in order to ascertain whether the grotesque body is an adequate interpretation of the societal placing of embodied difference within dance.

### **1.9 The way forward**

Dance companies that self identify as ‘integrated’ are caught in the bind of conforming to Garland Thomson’s notion of the normate, which has already been discussed. In order to gain recognition within mainstream dance, there is an implicit acceptance of the need to be categorized in a manner that highlights that company’s corporeal diversity, rather than the anonymity of being one more company among many. The three works that will be critiqued in the following chapters were all danced by companies formed in response to a specific project rather than maintaining a permanent company presence, a position that could be considered transitional in terms of integration. Rather than conforming to a preconceived identity, it allows dancers to be part of a company in transition, very much reflecting the position of the disabled body in a cultural sense. This notion will be explored in later chapters.

Following the contextualizing of physical diversity in dance through this historiological examination of the genre ‘integrated dance’, the next chapter will further discuss

the methodology underpinning this study, as well as defining some key elements that are contained within the thesis. Within academic research, Disability Studies covers a broad remit that includes a diverse range of subject matter. In this thesis, a variety of scholarly works will be referred to where appropriate, to provide contextual underpinning. However, the primary focus will be on those Disability Studies theorists who consider the embodied experience of disability, and the positioning of disability within the arts. The theorists cited here all exemplify this primary focus.

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- <sup>ii</sup> Louis Cozolino, Professor of Psychology at Pepperdine University, is a psychologist and psychotherapist who has incorporated neuroscientific knowledge into his understanding of human relationships. Throughout this thesis, neuroscientific thinking will be interwoven with Dance Studies in order to explore the potential for dance to be an agent of change when considering disability within the framework of interpersonal relationships. This exploration is from a generalist point of view and does not aim to provide a specialist, in depth study of neuroscientific research. As neuroscience is such a diverse field of study, this thesis is limiting its focus to those researchers whose exploration of interpersonal neurobiology can potentially be applied to dance performance.
- <sup>iii</sup> Rudolph Laban (1875-1958) was a dance artist and theorist who developed a system, Laban Movement Analysis, for recording and analyzing human movement. Labanotation was further developed by practitioners following on in Laban's footsteps and is widely used as a means of recording and analyzing dance and movement. In this thesis, the four main categories (body, effort, shape and space) contained in Laban's approach to movement have provided a reference point for analyzing the choreographic content of each performance.
- <sup>iv</sup> The Disability Arts Movement has been associated with the emergence of the Affirmative Model of Disability and is generally considered to be the expression of this movement, which embraces a positive identity based on an acceptance of impairment and disability that is not grounded in personal tragedy. When considered within the parameters of this thesis, the Affirmative Model of Disability continues to uphold the acceptance of difference as being separated from a recognized norm in terms of dance performance. As such, it can be understood as a development leading towards a more advanced understanding of diversity but is still placed within the confines of normative thinking. See John Swain and Sally French, 'Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability' in *Disability and Society*, Volume 15, Issue 4, 2000, pp.569-82.
- <sup>v</sup> Pedestrian movement describes dance originating from everyday gestures and movements, performed in a non-stylized way. It emerged in the 1960s, in the works of choreographers associated with the Judson Dance Theater, New York, and heralded the beginning of the post modern dance movement. Contact improvisation, a form of dance based on collaborative, improvised interaction between dancers using weight and momentum, was developed by Steve Paxton, one of the foremost choreographers of the Judson Dance Theater.
- <sup>vi</sup> Victoria Marks' most recent collaboration with *Axis* is entitled 'What If Would You' and an interview with Marks and Smith can be viewed online at: <http://axisdance.org/2013/03/the-creation-of-what-if-would-you/> (accessed June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013)

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<sup>vii</sup> Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) defined the term *grotesque* in the original sense of the word, derived from the Italian *grottesca*, fifteenth century ornaments that did not represent reality but showed a level of artistic fantasy that blurred the boundaries between different life forms. The word *grotesque* in the Bakhtinian sense expresses inventive freedom and the move from a prevailing point of view to a new outlook.





## **Chapter Two**

### **Contextualizing Disability and Dance**

#### **2.1 Methodological Considerations**

Following the historiological examination of the development of integrated dance since its inception, this chapter will provide the methodological underpinning for this thesis as well as examining the contemporary issues that need to be addressed in order to contextualize the dance works that will be critiqued in following chapters.

In the Introduction several strands have been identified that are fundamental to the exploration of the intersection between dance and physical disability. The evolution of the Medical, Social and Biopsychosocial Models of Disability provides a conceptual framework for questioning the ontological meaning of having a disability in contemporary western society. The accepted notion of what constitutes a dancing body has been briefly considered in order to highlight the hegemony of the ‘sylph’, the highly trained dancing body that meets a perceived physical ideal. Viewing a dancing body that does not conform to this ideal has been alluded to, along with the negative ways in which disability is seen, whether in performance or in the wider context of everyday life. The anomalous juxtapositioning of invisibility and hypervisibility, along with reactions of pity and disgust, all influence the way disability is formulated as abject and marginalized. These strands provide the direction for a deeper exploration of physical disability as an element of dance performance, what that might signify in terms of viewer perceptions, and how it can be used to expand positive perceptions of disability.

The growth of research within disability studies has begun to encompass the placement of disability within cultural life, but as yet there has been little consideration of the role of dance as vehicle for empowerment and change. This almost blank space is exemplified

by the contents of the relatively recently published book *The Disability Studies Reader* (Davis, 2006)<sup>viii</sup> which offers a section devoted to Disability and Culture with not one mention of dance. As this is an introductory text book aimed at the undergraduate market, it would be presumed that a comprehensive overview of disability research would be represented, so the complete absence of dance is indicative of the severe lack of scholarship in this area, apart from the works of a small number of scholars and practitioners.

A review of the field showed that there are relatively few scholarly works that examine the placing of the disabled body in relation to performance and there are even fewer works available that address dance specifically (for example: Koppers 2003, 2007, Garland Thomson, 2009, Linton, 2006, Albright 2001, Foster 1996, Sandhal 2005, Benjamin 2002, Whatley, 2007). Any critical examination of the intersection of dance performance, disability and the role of viewing is even more limited (for example: Garland Thomson, 2009, Koppers 2007, Whatley, 2007, 2010.) It is necessary to look to other discourses within Disability Studies and beyond, in order to gain an overview of how the placement of disability within performance can be explored. The emergence of Disability Studies over the past twenty years as a legitimate area for scholarly research has more recently provided a growing body of work in relation to the visual arts and literature (Sandhal and Auslander, 2005; Snyder and Mitchell, 2006; Davis, 2005; Crutchfield and Epstein, 2000; Mitchell and Snyder, 2000; Garland Thomson, 1997). However, it is difficult to create a structure based on existing disability theory as dance is rarely considered as part of that lexicon. The social locations of disability in literature, the visual arts and theatre have informed the development of the theoretical underpinning of this thesis, but they have somewhat reduced value in terms of a dance focussed work. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's (2000) construct of disability as 'narrative prosthesis' in literature and film, examining how disability was historically used as a means of supporting the ascendancy of Garland Thomson's notion of the normate, provided a grounding for further exploration in

relation to the role of the disabled dancer in integrated dance settings. In discussing newly emerging film making that was politically motivated to raise awareness of disability issues, they highlighted the transformative power of the disabled actor no longer taking on the traditional 'cripple' role :

To move from the passive position of the silenced object of discourse in the cultural locations of disability to the active position of producer of knowledge about the social, political and phenomenological aspects of disability destabilizes any number of objectifying practices.

2006:203

The destabilization of existing perceptions of disability have also been closely examined within dance scholarship. Ann Cooper Albright (2001), along with Petra Kuppers (2003), are among the very few academics who have written specifically about dance performance and disability. Both women come from the perspective of having directly experienced being a performer with a disability; Cooper Albright due to spinal degeneration which brought about temporary episodes of paralysis, Petra Kuppers has periods of reduced mobility due to a congenital pain related impairment which requires the use of a wheelchair. Where Kuppers' interest in dance performance is contained within a more widely based approach to theatre and disability, Cooper Albright focuses exclusively on dance. Choreographing on her own body, she questioned the binary assumptions that divide the able bodied from the disabled and the 'sylph' from any other body that does not fit the stereotypical dancer mould. The construct of the sylph will be examined later in this chapter. In her performance, she attempted to challenge the preconceptions that limit the acceptance of who is and who is not a legitimate dancer. She interrogated the notion of the disabled body which is labelled as incomplete and invisible by western cultural standards. This is the body which does not match the aesthetic criteria necessary to place it on the hierarchical scale and consequently, it does not meet the requirements needed to uphold the predominant visual contract between dancer and viewer that is founded on virtuosity and desirability.

Through her performance, Cooper Albright was using her embodied presence as dancer to communicate her questioning of the existing concepts of dance. It is this embodied presence, and the way in which it engages the viewer in an interpersonal connection based on movement, that needs to be interrogated in order to create a framework that explores the way in which disability is perceived within dance performance.

A more recent publication in the field of social theory (Goodley et al., 2012) includes a chapter on dance and disability written by the author of this thesis, which encapsulates some of the earlier theorizing which led to the development of this research.<sup>ix</sup> When aspects of the embodied presence of disability in a dance idiom were presented at several international conferences<sup>x</sup>, they sparked a lively interest, but overall reactions would suggest that dance is not yet generally considered as a site for the investigation of disability in spite of the fact that there is quite a significant body of work relating to the placement of disability in other areas of the arts such as literature, film and other forms of theatre performance.<sup>xi</sup> This thesis can redress to some extent the lack of sources directly related to dance and disability, but more research focussing specifically on dance is badly needed in order to fully recognize this artform as a significant area of academic enquiry within Disability Studies. However, the emphasis in this thesis remains within the confines of Dance Studies and the placement of disability within performance.

## **2.2. Defining the terms**

In this thesis, theoretical underpinnings are drawn from diverse sources in order to create new approaches to viewing the disabled body that will contribute to scholarly thought in the field of dance and disability. This thesis aims to explore an understanding of human interconnection that need not be grounded in a qualitative value system that gauges worth by corporeality. Dance is one aspect of cultural life that can provide a means of undertaking such

an exploration. The notion of disability is in itself created by such a value system and needs to be interrogated in order to reposition and reframe disability as corporeal diversity. Embodied presence is an integral part of each person's humanity and is a fundamental expression of each person's 'being in the world'. Rather than a descriptor of deficiency and deprivation, disability can thus be understood as encompassing the diversity of embodied presence that constitutes social connectedness. Philosophical, psychological, neuroscientific and sociological sources are all used in the formulation of this new theorizing but trying to contextualize disability as it is currently understood within all these frameworks is not a straightforward task. The key terms and concepts will now be discussed.

### **2.3 The Medical/Social divide**

Activist and academic Vic Finkelstein's pioneering work in the 1970s brought attention to the oppression of those with disabilities caused by environmental and social factors and his insights contributed to the rise of the social model of disability. Medical sociology, on the other hand, continued to emphasize the view whereby disability is generally understood in terms of individual impairment being the disabling factor with a much more limited recognition of other disabling factors contained within the environment; the biological presence of impairment is foremost (Williams, 2006). This has had the effect of maintaining a perception of disability as purely a medical problem that requires a solution, a way of being that is a deviation from the norm.

Western societal constructions of disability are based on the notion that to be disabled is to be in a state of deficit, and consequently people with disabilities are stigmatized and placed at the margins of society (Wendell, 1996). The emphasis on personal tragedy and the medicalization of disability has led to the creation of a 'caring' industry that focuses on either rehabilitation or containment, categorizing people according to pathologized conditions

(Charlton, 2006). This raises the question of the need to maintain disability in this role, in order to ensure the continuation of an industry whose social capital is firmly rooted in benefitting the carers rather than the clients. However, this is a question that is outside the scope of this thesis and will not be explored beyond its relevance to the immediate task of examining current trends.

The social model of disability attempted to reframe this approach, highlighting the disabling effects of the environment on the individual rather than the limitations of his or her physicality. It saw disability as a representational system, not a medical problem. This social constructionist approach was successful in placing disability in the context of social enquiry rather than in the field of medical specialization and rehabilitation. However, this view subsumed the reality of living with a disability beneath a discourse of cultural representation, and embodied experience became secondary to theoretical issues regarding the disabling environment (Linton, 2007). As this social model of disability developed, it unfortunately lost along the way the presence of the body and the validity of the subjective, biological impact of having an impairment. Identity was understood as an ephemeral, socially produced representation. This does not allow for an embodied understanding of disability and negates individual lived experience (Siebers, 2008, Wendell, 1996). A more sophisticated and complex approach is needed, as disability scholar Carol Thomas states ‘there is an urgent need to rediscover a social relational understanding of disability, and to recognise that the crude equation of disability with restricted activity is a completely inadequate starting point.’ (2004:581).

The ongoing debate between the medical sociology understanding of disability (as being first and foremost the limitations caused by individual impairment), and the social model’s understanding (which is firmly based in the disabling social and physical environment), remains entrenched in a dualistic approach. Neither adequately deal with the

complex relationship between subjectivity, impairment and the disabling social and environmental factors that are all intertwined. Thomas, like social theorist Bill Hughes (2007), favours the social relational approach to disability in order to create a theoretical framework of understanding but there are limitations here also. Both recognize the lack of theoretical development that would allow for intersubjectivity. This intersubjectivity would provide direction for an inquiry into how the marginalization of disability can be redressed. The ontological approach that is currently emerging depends upon viewing disability as an inevitable consequence of all human existence, a natural outcome of human frailty (Turner, 2001). However the drawback with this approach is that it negates the uniqueness of diverse corporeal embodiments that create disability identity, and upholds the notion that disability reflects a lessening of complete, embodied presence. A new route needs to be found that will lead to a more integrated model for theorizing the placement of the disabled body within society and dance may contribute to providing that route.

## **2.4 Defining disability**

Underlying all of these elements is the enormous difficulty in actually defining disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 (Amended, 2008) states that an individual with a disability is someone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. It goes on to specify that physical disability is defined as having a physical impairment including:

any physiological disorder or condition, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one or more of the following body systems: neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs, respiratory (including speech organs), cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hemic and lymphatic, skin, and endocrine.

2008:35.104.4.1A

This classification of difference in terms of loss and deficit maintains an objectifying stance that ignores the experiential aspect of diversity in human life. (Snyder and

Mitchell, 2006). The word ‘disability’ itself has multiple meanings and the constantly changing terminology reflects the fluidity of the notion of disability.<sup>xii</sup> The *United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006) recognizes the fact that there is no universal definition that will encapsulate the notion, and that language is a significant factor in sustaining the negative stereotypes that surround disability. What the United Nations Convention does provide in its accompanying *Handbook for Parliamentarians* (2006:2) is a very clear statement that ‘universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of all human rights and fundamental freedoms’ should be guaranteed to all without discrimination. This is perhaps one of the strongest affirmative statements made in relation to disability that is offered by an authority, rather than being implicitly exclusionary. It is in marked contrast to the A.D.A. prescriptive definition of disability. Admittedly, both statements serve different purposes as the A.D.A. definition is necessary in terms of identifying those who are entitled to benefits and accommodations in their everyday lives. However, the U.N. document implicitly upholds an acceptance of equality whereas the A.D.A. document quoted demonstrates a basic acceptance of difference as non-normative.

Unfortunately, language used to describe any kind of disability ultimately becomes a weapon of prejudice rather than a neutral descriptor (Snyder and Mitchell, 2006:9). New terminology is introduced in order to escape from the negative connotations that accrue to existing words, and as already noted, terminology that is socially acceptable in one geographical area may be considered deeply insulting in another; the disability lexicon varies depending upon cultural locations. For example, ‘handicapped’ is a word that is now considered derogatory by many people and its use is frowned upon in the U.K., yet it is widely used in public signage in many parts of the U.S. Similarly, the category ‘mental retardation’ is generally deemed unacceptable and has been replaced by the words ‘intellectual disability’, yet



the former is still used in the World Health Organization's manual for the classification of diseases, the ICD-10<sup>xiii</sup>.

The very word 'disability' carries an emotive charge that reflects the ambivalence contained in interactions where physical difference is not assimilated into cultural life. This creates a shifting ground of semantic uncertainty that is symptomatic of the whole notion of disability within society, and trying to formulate a coherent structure in which to place dance and disability is no easy task. It is this pervading sense of uncertainty that has influenced the development of this thesis. The use of the prefix 'dis' when combined with ability, underlines the negative perception of bodies that do not comply with the normative. Disability carries with it an implication of lack, of incompleteness precluding acceptance within the normative spectrum of what constitutes human embodiment. When this is applied to the dancing body, an even more stringent code of acceptability comes into play. Sociologist David Johnstone states:

The labels themselves have emerged from the implicit disapproval and associations with 'unworthiness' that lie at the heart of society's judgement of normative differences and disability as deviance.

2001:6

An attempt was made to find an alternative word for this work that might reflect a neutral understanding of different embodiments, but after searching existing literature within Disability Studies, no commonly recognized alternative was found. A decision was made to include the use of the words 'disabled' and 'disability' along with other descriptors of diverse corporeality, because the alternatives did not offer anything less judgemental, they all relied on the acceptance of a normative to create a comparison. As Johnstone points out, the words most commonly used to describe the experience of a different embodiment; impairment, disability and handicap, all interpret disability in terms of medical intervention, personal tragedy and economic loss (2001:7). These elements can be directly related to the historical unfolding of western societal perceptions of disability, which will be explored further in relation to dance performance in later chapters.

Disability is essentially a social construct, so despite repeated efforts to create a common understanding, definitions tend to reflect the specific agendas of the organizations which create them. Those organizations focussing on addressing social discrimination will interpret disability in terms of stigma and environmental restrictions; medical organizations will think in terms of individual impairment and treatment. The World Health Organization (WHO) has tried in recent years to address this fluctuation between the medical model of disability and the social model of disability through the creation of a new approach within their document, *The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health* (2001). This approach is based on the biopsychosocial model of medical intervention within western society, which has been in existence for over thirty years now, and was initially developed by psychiatrist George Engel (1977) in order to recognize all the elements that play a part in illness and its treatment. The ‘bio’ aspect recognizes the organic/somatic element of illness, the ‘psycho’ aspect recognizes the importance of the individual’s psychological responses to illness, and the ‘social’ aspect recognizes the importance of the social system in which the individual is placed and how that can influence illness.

In attempting to apply this model to the classification of disability, the WHO has managed only to reinforce the medical model approach rather than providing an alternative. This attempt to create a cohesive model that recognizes both the psyche and soma of the individual, along with environmental factors, is still enmeshed in the personal tragedy scenario of disability. There is still a perceived dependence on intervention in the form of able bodied professionals whose role it is to manage and treat the ‘problem’ of disability (Mitchell and Snyder, 2006, Linton, 2007). Disability as a mode of being is understood as a deviation from the norm, a lack that reduces the humanity of the person to a condition requiring treatment first and foremost, through which individuality is filtered and constructed using an able bodied lens. The biopsychosocial model of disability starts from this premise.

Finkelstein has examined these attempts at creating a new understanding of disability. He recognized the shortcomings of the biopsychosocial approach and questioned the societal structures that support the need to marginalize the vulnerabilities and dependencies that are part of the human condition. Speaking as a man with a disability, he pointed out that

[i]t is as if people with capabilities have deposited their own natural vulnerability, and genuine social dependency into us so that these attributes of being human are unique to being disabled.

Finkelstein, 2002

Finkelstein's belief, that the disabled body holds the vulnerability and dependency that reflects the frailty of the human condition, follows a historical pattern where the outsider plays a vital role in allowing society to maintain distance from all that is abject and base (Garland Thomson, 1996). As long as society can identify and marginalize the outsider, the negative aspects of existence can be contained and disempowered. When applied to dance specifically, this is the premise that ultimately nullifies the value of the use of the word 'integrated' in relation to dance. As already discussed, the use of the label only serves to isolate and differentiate integrated dance, making it the marginalized poor relation of professional dance, existing only on the fringes of mainstream performance. Perhaps a reframing of the concept is needed, and rather than using the word 'integrated' to describe dance that is inclusive of different corporealities, it might be better conceived as 'liminal' in anthropologist Victor Turner's (1920 - 83) sense of the word, imbuing this dance with the power to deconstruct and rebuild an understanding of disability. Turner developed this notion of liminality in his exploration of societal systems. He identified the liminal as the 'betwixt and between' space where everyday beliefs and social structures are suspended in order to facilitate societal change (1998). Dance scholar Ann Cooper Albright states:

When a disabled dancer takes the stage, he or she stakes a claim to a radical space, an unruly location where disparate assumptions about representation, subjectivity, and visual pleasure collide.

2001:58

The liminal microcosm of the performance space, this ‘unruly location’, can be used to bring about the disruption of exclusionary societal perceptions of disability, reframing the notion of difference by providing an experience, through the medium of dance, that is inclusive of different corporealities. By fracturing the predominant notion of professional dance by introducing bodies that do not conform to an idealized physicality, a new possibility is created. A revised understanding has to be formed of what actually constitutes dance, no longer bound by the regulatory limitations of existing canons. New concepts of dancing bodies, new movement vocabularies, and choreography that embraces diversity can all contribute towards a revised understanding of the embodied presence of the dancer being valid, regardless of physicality. By tracing the history of professional dance and the embodiment of the notion of ‘dancer’, this new approach to conceptualizing dance can be explored in the context of existing notions of disability.

## **2.5 Defining dance**

Dance has been a fundamental means of expression and communication for man since the beginnings of social interaction. It relies on nothing other than the body itself and it is such an intrinsic part of being human, it could be said that from the earliest movement in utero, the human body begins a dance of life that continues until the final breath. Neuroscience is actually uncovering new knowledge regarding life in utero, suggesting that this is the beginning of an inter-relational dance of a rhythmic complexity that had not previously been thought possible (Trevarthen, 2010).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word ‘dance’ as ‘to move rhythmically to music, typically following a set sequence of steps’. This definition does not offer anywhere near a full understanding of the complexity of the act of dancing. The impetus to dance can come from an inner rhythm not requiring any external music, the movement in the dance can

be spontaneous and need not follow a predetermined pattern of steps (Maiello, 2001). Finding a universally acceptable definition of the word is extremely difficult as it is a human endeavour that can have many functions within society, as well as being an artform that is contained within many genres. There are countless definitions available that reflect the diversity of dance enquiry and each definition provides an insight into the underlying premises that are contained within individual research projects. As this research is focussing on the relationship between dancer and viewer through the act of viewing dance, dance will be defined here as movement that is intentional, often rhythmic, that can be both expressive and communicative in its execution. The origin of the word 'dance' is obscure, but can be traced back through the Romanic to the Gothic root, meaning 'to draw towards one'. This definition, 'to draw towards one', is an apt starting point for a formulation of dance that is based on the relationship between two people where dance is the intermediary. This notion of embodied interpersonal connection is a useful construct to apply when thinking about disability in a dance context, because reinforcement or subversion of perceptions of disability depend not only upon the content of the performance, but also upon the relationship between dancer and viewer within the performance (Kuppers, 2003, Garland Thomson 2009). Through this dynamic relationship based on interpersonal connection it will be possible to create a theoretical basis for dance as a means of changing negative perceptions of disability.

## **2.6 Dancing disability: The liminal space of performance**

Dancers with disabilities are rarely seen in professional dance performances and most dance works that do include performers with disabilities are often placed at the periphery of mainstream dance, usually with the label 'integrated dance' attached, as already discussed.

Scholars such as Kuppers (2003) and Cooper Albright (1997) have created a basis upon which to build a new concept of dance that no longer requires the label 'integrated', when

the acceptance of different physicalities as dancing bodies will make the notion obsolete. However, this is still firmly in the realm of the future. Present discourses are still entrenched in the struggle to move differently abled bodies from a position of abjection. Cooper Albright states

This intersection of dance and disability is an extraordinarily rich site at which to explore the overlapping constructions of the body's physical ability, subjectivity and cultural visibility that are implicated within many of our dominant cultural paradigms of health and self-determination.

2001:58

The emphasis on health and self determination is representative of the current state of disability in relation to dance, still bound by the placement of the differently abled body as outsider, medicalized and requiring to be fixed in order to better match the normative.

A fundamental shift in focus needs to be taken so that dance can become truly integrated. Sociologist Maria Shevtsova discusses performance as 'a conception of sociocultural signs' which 'embody the social and cultural dynamics in which they are generated' (2003:5), a view that is widely held in discourses of dance. She also points out that the communication of a performance does not necessarily happen at a cognitive level alone, 'understanding is also emotional, subliminal, unconscious, latent, and very often after the event'(ibid). It is this belief that is fundamental to extending an understanding of the power of dance beyond theories of sociocultural influences. A liminal approach to the communicative element of performance will open the way for the inclusion of other formulations of connectedness that are available in disciplines other than dance.

Recent neuroscientific research has begun to uncover the workings of the brain during infancy, and the need for healthy attachment in order for the successful development of neural connections required for cognitive and emotional growth. This healthy attachment is based on the holding of the infant in both a literal and a figurative sense. Physical holding, proximity to the primary caregiver, provides a sense of wellbeing if that holding is attuned to

physicality of the infant. The sensitivity of the caregiver to the subtle physical cues of the child allows for an ongoing state of adjustment, where every shift in movement is accommodated within the safety of the holding.

On a figurative level, empathic attunement between infant and caregiver fosters the development of relationship. An example of this can be seen in the holding of the gaze. The infant engages the gaze of the caregiver and an interaction is initiated that brings the infant to a heightened level of arousal. When this level of arousal becomes unbearable, as it inevitably must because the infant is only learning to self regulate at an emotional level, the infant and caregiver disengage. The infant is given time to re-establish equilibrium. This ongoing interactional dance provides a safe, holding environment in which the infant can grow towards psychic integration and separation from the primary caregiver as ego identity is formed.

Parallel to this process is the initial gaze of the spectator when faced with a differently abled body moving through space in a novel and unsettling manner. The comfortable viewing of dance is fractured, as stereotypical layers of interpretation try to reconcile a differently abled body in motion with an expectation of dance movement that is usually connected to the notion of the sylph. The gaze becomes the stare and some form of accommodation has to be reached in order to regain a level of equilibrium. The relationship between dancer and viewer will either revert to the 'victim art' approach to dance or will transform into a new relationship that embraces bodily diversity.

This is an experience of intersubjective communication that can be created within a performance setting. It allows for a connection to be made that does not depend on verbal communication, but rather on the embodied presence of the other.

Somatic connection can awaken emotional responses that will enhance the relationship between dancer and spectator. As in watching any performance, the emotional reaction that movement engenders is reflective of the quality of the movement. Aesthetic

quality differentiates between the mediocre and the exceptional in performance. With an underlying aesthetic quality, dance that includes all corporealities will allow for this emotional response and will resonate with previous experience of emotion that has not been filtered through the signification process that comes into being with the acquisition of language.

A further link can be made between early child development and the liminality of performance. Psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott, in his development of object relations theory, uncovers the child's first experience of liminality. Following on from Freud's theories of child development, Winnicott looked at the pre oedipal stage of development (birth to approximately three years) and examined how the child separates from the mother and becomes aware of his own individuality. The attunement already discussed gives the infant the notion of omnipotence. Gradually, the mother withdraws her availability, as a natural progression in the maturational process, and this lessening of synchrony disillusion the child over time and the act of psychic separation from the mother occurs. In order to survive this withdrawal, children create and use transitional objects which become symbolic representations of the mother, for example, teddies or cuddly blankets. These objects can be manipulated and controlled giving a sense of omnipotence in a limited, finite way. These objects are used in what Winnicott calls *potential space*, where fantasy and reality meet. This is an area of paradox, where what is given (the object – toy) is also made (the child's symbolic representation projected onto the toy). Winnicott holds that this is where the child's cultural experience begins. This is the child's first use of a symbol and the first use of cultural symbolism. 'The capacity for symbolization, arising in infancy, matures into the ability to generate and use artistic creations, religious beliefs, and imaginative ideals in later life.' (Winnicott, 1967.) The child's experience of liminality extends as he goes out into the world and engages with others and this is the birth of Turner's anthropological notion of *communitas* (1969). This is the intense sense of community that occurs in situations outside the everyday where there is an equality between participants,



relieving any need to maintain existing hierarchies. According to Turner, this usually occurs in ritual situations such as religious ceremonies or rites of passage. *Communitas* occurs where social structure has been removed, as in liminal space, and it is the binding relationship between the participants within the ritual process. Turner believes that *communitas* has an existential quality that provides a potentiality for the outsider to undermine the existing order. He states ‘*Communitas* breaks through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath the structure, in inferiority.’ (1969:128). This is the positioning of the disabled body in many contemporary dance performances and it has the potential to become a position of empowerment and agency, a possibility that will be explored in later chapters when dance performances will be critiqued in light of interpersonal connection.

The relationship between those with and without disabilities is grounded in the symbolic frameworks that are present in everyday life. These symbolic frameworks need to be deconstructed and Turner’s (1969) notion of the liminoid<sup>xiv</sup> offers a means of doing so. The performance space itself can be understood as the site of liminality, the threshold that disconnects from the existing social structures responsible for marginalizing the disabled. The performer enters into a relationship with the viewer through a level of interaction that suspends all previous hierarchical perceptions. Turner’s notion of *communitas* is the dynamic upon which social change is built, where the relationship between dancer and viewer will determine whether or not liminal space can be successfully used as a means of changing societal perceptions of physical disability. The liminal state holds many layers of meaning in relation to the disabled body. Ann Cooper Albright has described the disabled body as one that is ‘neither entirely ‘present’ nor intriguingly ‘absent’, but rather liminal, struggling somewhere between the shores of theoretical surefootedness’ (1997:60). In the negative sense, the liminal describes the invisibility of the disabled body which is forced into an ‘inbetween’ state because of socially constructed barriers, it cannot be accepted as whole, healthy or complete. In

studying liminality and disability in hypermodern society, academics Jeffrey Willett and Mary Jo Deegan develop the argument that disabled people are in danger of remaining in a permanent liminal state, a fixed state of outsiderhood, because society itself is disabling. The physical and social constructs of the environment are exclusionary and ‘these disabling societies create barriers that prevent disabled individuals from completing the passage to social reincorporation’ (2001:152). This statement, based on the social model, again fails to take into consideration the role of intersubjectivity in realising the potential for change. Rather than remaining forever liminal, the very act of liminality, when shared with others within the ritual space of performance, frees the participants to overcome barriers and allows for a more highly evolved level of social reincorporation. Dance provides the means.

Dance as a non linguistic means of communication is a powerful tool and it awakens a prelinguistic level of being that is somatically based rather than symbolically based. If this level of being could be accessed as a starting point for rebuilding a continuum of ability that does not exclude, but rather encompasses all forms of embodiment, there could be a clear path to changing existing societal perceptions. However, this prelinguistic level is overwritten by the socially constructed narratives of disability as transgressive. The underlying premise of liminality is that these narratives may be subjugated within liminal space as viewer and dancer each face the other. Liminal performance requires that these constructions of disability be set aside in order to free the viewer so that new understandings can emerge. Turner recognized the creative force that can be released within the liminal. He believed that ‘marginality and structural inferiority are conditions in which are frequently generated myths, symbols, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art’ (1969:128) and that these are the cultural forms that allow for the ‘periodical reclassifications of reality and man’s relationship to society, nature and culture’ (ibid.). It is this possibility of reclassification of reality within liminal space that is contained in dance performance.

In following a path from the social and medical constructions of disability, through the linguistic minefield of the labels used to define different ways of being in the world, and the biological and psychological interconnectedness that is intrinsic in all human life, the notion of embodied presence is the one constant that is the thread linking some very disparate constructs. It is through these interdisciplinary links, particularly in the field of neuroscience (for example, Panksepp, 2009; Cozolino, 2006, Siegel, 2012, Schore, 2012), that new interpretations of embodiment can come about. Starting from the premise that dancing is a universal mode of expression of the human condition, this could be the route to providing a means of interpersonal communication that does not rely on the interventions of language.

Through intentional movement, an interpersonal dialogue can be achieved that is not dependent on any other form of expression, neither words nor music are necessary, only a body that can move is required (Chodorow, 1999). How that body moves has become a fundamental question that underscores the contemporary understanding of dance. The aims of this research are to deconstruct this prevailing understanding in relation to physical disability and to use new thinking that is emerging in social neurobiology (Cozolino, 2006, Schore, 2012, Siegel, 2012) in order to reframe the notion of such dance. The neurobiological mode of somatic communication is the key to this thesis, positing that dance can be used as a means of changing societal perceptions of disability through making interpersonal connections at a somatic level that does not have to rely on linguistic constraints and uncertainties.

The misconceptions and prejudices surrounding disability are deeply ingrained at a linguistic level in the communal psyche, creating the narratives that uphold the notion of the transgressive body. The reframing of that notion needs to come about beneath the layers of narrative that occur within linguistic representation. Dance participation and performance can be a powerful intermediary force that has the ability to reach such a fundamental level of connection, linking those with and without disabilities. Through viewing and performing,

interpersonal connections can be made upon which to build a relationship that is based on the humanity of the other. This thesis aims to reconcile the apparent anomalies of using dance as a means of integration, and to offer a theoretical structure that will support the argument that dance can indeed be an agent for change in perceptions of disability.

The very beginnings of this research had its roots in the use of dance and movement with people with severe disabilities, and over several years of psychotherapeutic practice with disabled clients. Dance Movement Therapist and Authentic Movement founder Mary Starks Whitehouse stated:

‘In the deepest sense, movement is the flow of energy that belongs to all livingness.’  
Starks Whitehouse, c.1956. cited in Pallaro, 1999:37

It is this fundamental quality that was used very successfully in order to create interconnectedness between therapist and client<sup>xv</sup>, especially where the level of disability was so severe that verbal communication was not possible for the client.

Historically, dance has always had a therapeutic value within the community. As discussed, Turner (1987) recognized the importance of shared activities outside the normal everyday lives of people when he spoke of the liminal space where ritual processes took place, a place and time marked by clear boundaries from everyday activities, very much parallel to the therapeutic space created by the therapist when working with a client, or the performance space of dance, whether theatre based or site specific.

Turner’s description of the liminal process as being ‘a fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities, not a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structures, a gestation process’ (1987:42), is also a clear parallel to the therapeutic setting or performance space. For him, the liminal was that space that no longer belonged to everyday life, it was the space that facilitated growth and change. In ritual, away from cultural constraints, new structures could be incorporated in a symbolic way, embracing change within an individual and encouraging

psychic growth in a safe and contained environment. In joining with a client, the therapist is providing the opportunity for this process of growth and change to take place, as well as reaffirming the underlying relationship, using multiple modes of communication that are not linguistically based. In the performance space, where language is not necessary, this potential must also exist.

These thoughts provided the starting point for considering how dance performance could be theorized in terms of interpersonal relationships and the ‘storehouse of possibilities’ in terms of growth and change of which Turner had spoken. In searching for sources upon which to base this theorizing, it became obvious that the therapeutic use of dance has been well researched and documented, but there is a paucity of any other published material that is directly relevant to disability and dance, hence the need to expand parameters in order to conceptualize the dancing body in terms of relationship, not physicality. An understanding of dance that takes cognizance of intersubjectivity rather than a traditional notion of perceived physical expertise would perhaps create a more inclusive understanding of dance performance.

This will lead to a radical shift in emphasis away from the more traditional physical parameters that are applied to bodies in deciding whether or not particular physicalities make acceptable dancers. These parameters evolved over several centuries as western theatre dance developed, and they continue to influence perceptions of what constitutes a legitimate dancing body.

A brief history of this evolution will now be discussed as it provides insight into how current perceptions have arisen and how these perceptions have influenced the non acceptance of integrated dance as a valid art form alongside other dance genres that are granted cultural value as ‘high art’.

## **2.7 The creation of the sylph**

Since its inception as an art form, western theatre dance has played a role in reflecting the political and social climate of its time, as well as providing a means of critical comment and resistance. As already discussed, perceptions of what types of dancing bodies are acceptable in performance have been an integral part of this role and it is necessary to examine the placing of the body within western theatre dance from a historical context, in order to fully understand the significance of having a disabled body being present on stage, both as reflective of existing social norms and as subversive, taking a critical stance in relation to those norms. The perceptions of what is an acceptable dancing body, which were briefly referred to in the Introduction, have changed drastically over the past century, influenced by the broadening of horizons within the western dance aesthetic. Historically, western theatre dance performance has been dominated by the ballet canon, with its roots in the introduction of ballet in the sixteenth century as a codified form of French and Italian court dance.

In recent years, an anthropological approach to the study of western theatre performance has provided an effective means of investigating the cultural milieux that gave rise to the notion of 'high art' and the emergence of ballet as the epitome of artistic endeavour. Anthropologist Joann Kealiinohmoku (2001) creates the argument that ballet should be understood as a form of ethnic dance, maintaining the belief that all forms of dance reflect the cultural traditions within which they developed. She traces the emergence of ballet as the prime expression of 'high art' within western theatre dance up until the beginning of the twentieth century. This expression of 'high art' underlies the driving forces behind the cultural construct of the ideal form of corporeality that needs to meet specific requirements in terms of physique and intensive training in order to reflect the high cultural value placed on the upright, orderly body. This body, capable of controlled, athletic movement, became the norm from which alternative corporealities were excluded. The creation of a norm, holding an apparently neutral

position, led to the cultural creation of ‘otherness’, the body that is consequently perceived as flawed, incomplete, deformed.

The balletic body dominated theatre dance. Slim, long limbed, rigidly trained to achieve virtuosity, aiming to rise above the pedestrian movement of everyday life and offering an ideal based on ethereality, this body was the epitome of artistry. The performance of ballet, since its emergence from French and Italian social court dance (*danse de cour*) of the sixteenth century, reflected the philosophical and scientific beliefs of western thought through the renaissance and baroque periods. Dance was much more than a means of social engagement, it was an expression of man’s understanding of the universe. The intricate floor patterns created by the dancers in *danse de cour* were representative of Pythagorean / Platonic philosophy based on harmony and unity. ‘*Plato’s interpretation of the entire visible world depends absolutely on the concept of measured dance, that is, the mathematics of cosmic choreography.*’ (Pont, 2008:274, italics author’s own).

Bodily movement was already culturally codified in that graceful deportment was seen as a distinguishing factor that created the divide between the noble and the common man. By the mid seventeenth century, Cartesian dualism had emerged that extolled the virtue of transcending all that is carnal. This was expressed in the embodiment of a verticality that emphasized control of the torso, the baser aspect of existence. Sixteenth century court dances reflected ‘a graceful rapport between dancer and society and between human movement and the movement of the universe’ (Leigh Foster, 1986:101). The physical arrangement of both participants and viewers present at Renaissance court spectacles was carefully choreographed in order to reflect and reinforce ‘a sense of the world as an invulnerable microcosm in which the members of all social classes were inscribed and held in place’ (*ibid.* p.102).

Catherine de Medici brought Italian renaissance culture to the French court when she married Henry Duke of Orleans, of the house of Valois (later to become King Henry II).

With the emphasis on culture as a means of expressing the political power and moral superiority of the ruling class, huge sums of money were invested in developing dance and music in the French court. In 1581, *Le Ballet Comique de la Reine* was performed at the Louvre, choreographed by the court dancing master Balthasar de Beaujoyeulx, and is generally considered to be the first authentic ballet to emerge from *danse de cour*. Ballet historian Carol Lee reflects on the impact of this ballet when she describes the performance, stating that ‘apart from its profusion of symbolism and references to current religious and political turmoil, the *Ballet Comique*’s sheer artistic appeal was one of overriding power.’ (Lee, 2002:44). She goes on to state that it could be considered ‘the most successful European experiment with the human body in theatrical space up to that time’ (*ibid.*) and was ‘a political, philosophical and ethical mirror of its day, the *Ballet Comique* was a premiere example of a new genre.’ (*ibid.*).

The foundation was laid for ballet as a performance art that reflected the cultural mores of the day, and ballet continued to develop through the seventeenth century within the French court. Apart from his love of dance performance, Louis XIV saw the potential for ballet to be used as a way of stabilizing and controlling his rule and maintaining a hierarchy within the court that would work to his advantage. Dance formed a central aspect of court life as it was the one of the main means of social engagement and through its manipulation, ‘ballet could be an auspicious means for reducing factional, domestic strife and building national prestige’ (Lee, 2002:66). Through the institutionalization of dance, Louis was able to maintain a level of control even when he no longer took an active part in performance.

The creation of *L’Academie Royale de Danse* (1661) was the starting point for this institutionalization and this was further developed when Louis retired from dancing. As his courtiers had to reflect the wishes and actions of the king if they wanted to stay in favour, they also had to forego active participation in ballet spectacles. The formation of *L’Academie Royale de Musique et Danse* (1672) marked the beginning of professional ballet, as it was no



longer the domain of the aristocracy as a court entertainment. Ballet was now codified with the combination of *danse de cour* with its intricate floor patterns and of *danse d'ecole* which had its roots in renaissance times, and provided the basis for codified technique.

With its roots firmly established in the realms of philosophical, social and political ascendancy, ballet continued to develop as 'high art'. However, as well as upholding the existing status quo, ballet performances were also a means of criticizing and subverting the current government of society and so from its infancy, ballet was used as a vehicle for social and political comment. The codified use of gesture, dance steps and floor patterns provided a lexicon for veiled criticism that introduced the possibility for subversion within performance. 'High art' provided indirect social commentary, an interesting concept which will later be discussed in relation to the development of the notion of victim art in dance performance. Such performance by a disabled body shatters this illusory notion of perfection.

## **2.8 Protecting 'high art' from the disabled body: the creation of 'victim art'**

Having briefly examined the emergence of ballet as epitomizing dance as 'high art', a clear picture has emerged of the type of body that would uphold societal perceptions of ability and inclusion within western theatre dance. However, when considering dance as subversive, the presence of a differently abled body in performance can impact on those perceptions. Finkelstein advocates rethinking the social model of disability, stating that 'repossessing the social model of disability means searching for openings in the structures of society where we might effectively contribute with others in the restructuring of society' (2002). Dance as an aesthetic expression of cultural values can be one such opening, offering a means of communicating new realities of embodiment that are not defined by the existing understanding of disability.

This communication is reliant on the relationship between the viewer and the dancer. Where existing norms are upheld, the viewer looks upon the disabled dancing body as abject, outside the normative, and performance is seen in terms of victim art, as already discussed. Where performance upholds existing assumptions, the status quo is maintained. However, if performance is created that disrupts existing societal notions of what constitutes a dancer, that performance can potentially have a transformative effect on existing norms. By offering an alternative way of looking at disabled dancers and the communicative power of their dance, the aesthetic considerations as outlined by Croce become invalid. Looking and communicating can both be encapsulated in the neurobiological understanding of intersubjectivity, which will now be considered.

## **2.9 Intersubjectivity and dance performance**

This thesis investigates how non traditional dancing bodies can be theorized in terms of inclusion rather than exclusion, by using a framework based on the notion of intersubjectivity. Existing performance theories do not provide an adequate means of critically engaging with dance performance from this intersubjective stance. Some theorists such as Valerie Briginshaw<sup>xvi</sup> have considered subjectivity in relation to performance, others have focussed on the liminality of performance, for example Susan Broadhurst in her work *Liminal Acts* (1999). However, the liminal element of an intersubjectivity grounded in neurobiology appears to have not been explored within dance studies. Consequently, current performance theory does not provide a critical framework that can be applied within this study. Another approach will have to be developed.

Like ‘dance’, intersubjectivity is a term which can also have multiple meanings depending upon the context, but it is generally understood as a psychological phenomenon in which there is a shared experience between two minds which is based on joint affect and

cognition; this experience of intersubjectivity mediates all cultural learning (Trevarthen and Aitken, 2001). Through exploring the creation of human relationships and how intersubjectivity develops philosophically, sociologically and neuroscientifically, it may be possible to view dance performance in a new light with regard to the physicalities of the performers. The aim of this exploration is to interrogate the possibility of an intersubjectivity that will positively impact on how disability is perceived, in order to consider whether dance performance can bring about positive change in societal perceptions of physical difference.

In the following chapters, three contemporary dance works, performed by dancers of diverse corporealities, will be critically examined in relation to the development of societal beliefs and attitudes towards physical disability. These understandings of disability can be loosely divided into three historiologically evolving schemata of perceptions: the disabled body as freak, the disabled body as heroic victim, and the disabled body as an expression of corporeal diversity. Each performance will focus on one of these schemata.

It will become evident that there has been no neat, linear development along the path towards societal integration of bodily diversity, but rather an accumulation of differing attitudes that continue to exist in varying degrees, depending upon each individual's experience of disability within a biopsychosocial context. The performances provide a vehicle to explore not only the impact of the choreographic intent upon the viewer, but also the widely varying attitudes towards different physicalities that can be present within an audience at any one performance. This critical examination also facilitates an insight into the efficacy, or otherwise, of each performance in its potential to achieve a position of equality and integration regardless of the variations in the physicalities of the dancers.

Throughout this exploration, the focus will continue to be on the interpersonal relationships that are created within each dance performance, rather than a purely aesthetic evaluation of each work. It is through the interpersonal connections between dancer and viewer

that change can come about, and the links created between perceptions of disability and dance performance will provide the basis for the theoretical framework which will be proposed following the exploration of these performances.

In trying to formulate a way forward in this exploration, it is necessary to contextualize existing placements of disability and this can best be undertaken by using a historiographical model. When this model is applied to the development of dance performance and the cultural placement of disability, a natural progression emerges that suggests a framework leading from the marginalization of any corporeality that is considered outside a perceived norm and therefore not a legitimate dancing body, up to the existing state of dance that is inclusive of different physicalities but still maintains the binary of non disabled/disabled; and then forward to the possibilities offered by applying new neurobiological knowledge to the act of viewing bodies dancing.

As there is such fluidity around the whole concept of disability, dance, and integrated dance, it follows that the unfolding of this exploration needs to reflect the dynamic aspects of an artform that is constantly shifting and changing. For this reason, three different dance performances including both non disabled and disabled dancers have been selected as the focal points for evaluating the historical connections that directly influence current perceptions of disability; for considering how interpersonal relationships have been theorized previously; and how these relationships can now be theorized in light of new knowledge regarding the experience of the spectator.

## **2.10 The performances**

These three performances offer a means of developing not only a historical view of differing perceptions of disability, but also the progression of these perceptions in terms of how they impact on interpersonal relationships between those with and without disabilities. The presence of disabled bodies on stage, and the framing of that presence by the choreographic intent of each performance maker, can be viewed as an allegory for the different evolutionary stages of these societal perceptions. Furthermore, such critical examination facilitates an insight into the efficacy of each performance in its potential to achieve equality and integration regardless of physicality, unfolding the philosophical, sociological and performative aspects of communication through dance.

Chapter Three will centre around the performance of *Gimp* (2008), choreographed by Heidi Latsky. *Gimp* is a confrontational work that highlights the disabled body as freak, underpinned by Latsky's intention to subvert that understanding through a politically driven choreography that challenges the viewer to stare. Critical evaluation of this work will be complemented by an analysis of the historical emergence of freak performance as an expression of changing societal perceptions of disability following the Industrial Revolution. Interpersonal communication will be considered from both a philosophical and anthropological stance by referencing the work of Turner (1969) in his exploration of Carnival and the grotesque as applicable to this performance. Abjection, and the liminal placement of disability will also be examined both historically and as expressed within contemporary theatre practice. Links will be made to the neurobiological sources of fear, horror and disgust (Cozolino, 2006).

Chapter Four focuses on the influence of the Medical Model of disability through a critical analysis of Tamar Rogoff's work *Diagnosis of a Faun* (2009). The historical rise of the pathologizing of disability will be considered, where difference has been firmly placed in the non-normative sphere, requiring medical intervention in order to impose either conformity

or acquiescence and control. Rogoff's work centres on rehabilitation and transcendence despite disability, while at the same time maintaining the exclusionary positioning of the differently abled body as the unknowable other. The dehumanization that results from this conflation of abnormality and physical diversity will be interrogated through examining the notion of victim art in performance and philosopher Martin Buber's notion of I/Thou interpersonal connection. The neurobiological systems that govern curiosity in the development of socialization will be considered.

Chapter Five offers a critical evaluation of Petra Kupper's filmdance *Water Burns Sun* (2009) as representative of the ontological expression of corporeal diversity through movement. The intersection of the notion of the 'baroque stare', as postulated by disability academic Rosemarie Garland Thomson, and the neurobiological mechanisms that support the development of empathy (Schore, Cozolino, 2006) will be explored in relation to this choreography. Interpersonal connectivity as theorized by philosopher and neuroscientist Alva Noë (2009) will be used to develop the exploration of how human interaction comes about through seeing and being seen.

These three chapters will critically evaluate the development of integrated dance from an evolutionary perspective, providing the means to engage with existing practice at multiple levels, depending on the intentions of the choreographer as well as the awareness and insight of the viewer when confronted with physical difference. In light of the critical analyses contained in these chapters, Chapter Six will consider the application of interpersonal neurobiology (Cozolino 2006, Siegel 2012, Schore, 2012) to viewing dance performance. Contemporary attachment theory (Trevvarthen, 2003) will also be considered in order to further develop new theoretical connections between the philosophical, sociological and neurobiological understandings of interpersonal relationships within performance. The critical analysis of these performances will be informed by the concepts developed within this chapter

in order to explore the creation of a framework for considering dance that is firmly based in embodied presence.

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<sup>viii</sup> See Lennard J. Davis, Ed. (2006) *The Disabilities Studies Reader 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* New York:Routledge.

<sup>ix</sup> See McGrath, Eimir. (2012) 'Dancing with Disability. An Intersubjective Approach.' in Dan Goodley, Bill Hughes and Lennard Davis. *Disability and Social Theory. New Developments and Directions* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>x</sup> Specific negative responses by dance academics and practitioners to the presentation of a paper focussing on Kuppers' *water burns sun* will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>xi</sup> For examples of these theoretical investigations, see Mitchell and Snyder (2000), Davidson (2008) and Crutchfield and Epstein ((2000).

<sup>xii</sup> The U.N. Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has tried to surmount the difficulties contained in accepting a purely medical or social model of understanding disability. The *Handbook for Parliamentarians* recognizes and discusses the rights of all people to engage in interpersonal relationships that create community, and the convention has acknowledged the complexity of the issue regarding discrimination and integration. In the section explaining why a Convention was needed, the document states:

Persons with disabilities are still primarily viewed as “objects” of welfare or medical treatment rather than “holders” of rights. The decision to add a universal human rights instrument specific to persons with disabilities was borne of the fact that, despite being theoretically entitled to all human rights, persons with disabilities are still, in practice, denied those basic rights and fundamental freedoms that most people take for granted. At its core, the Convention ensures that persons with disabilities enjoy the same human rights as everyone else and are able to lead their lives as full citizens who can make valuable contributions to society if given the same opportunities as others.  
2006:2

<sup>xiii</sup> The ICD-10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, 10<sup>th</sup> Revision) is the international medical coding system of the World Health Organization. Chapter 5, 1.8 (F70-79) classifies Mental Retardation. The ICD 11 is currently being compiled and the use of the term 'Mental Retardation' is being reconsidered, to be replaced by 'Intellectual Disability'.

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<sup>xiv</sup> Liminoid activity refers to participation in leisure activities within complex modern societies, where there is the opportunity to transcend and subvert social structural limitations. See Turner, Victor (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre* PAJ Publications, New York.

<sup>xv</sup> Unfortunately, it is this very success that has to a large extent defined dance in relation to disability. As a result, any dance that included disabled dancers was automatically thought of as serving a therapeutic purpose until the emergence of integrated companies such as *Axis* and *Candoco* towards the end of the twentieth century

<sup>xvi</sup> See Valerie Briginshaw, (2009) *Dance, Space and Subjectivity* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. London: Palgrave MacMillan.







## Chapter Three

### ***GIMP: Confronting the Freak***

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In the following chapters, three contemporary dance works, performed by dancers of diverse corporealities, will be critically examined in relation to the development of societal beliefs and attitudes towards physical disability. These understandings of disability can be loosely divided into three historiologically evolving schemata of perceptions: the disabled body as freak, the disabled body as heroic victim, and the disabled body as an expression of corporeal diversity. Each performance will focus on one of these schemata.

It will become evident that there has been no neat, linear development along the path towards societal integration of bodily diversity but rather, as already discussed, an accumulation of differing attitudes that continue to exist in varying degrees, depending upon each individual's experience of disability within a biopsychosocial context. The performances provide a vehicle to explore not only the impact of the choreographic intent upon the viewer, but also the widely varying attitudes towards different physicalities that can be present within an audience at any one performance. This critical examination also facilitates an insight into the efficacy, or otherwise, of each performance in its potential to achieve a position of equality and integration regardless of the variations in the physicalities of the dancers.

Throughout this exploration, the focus will continue to be on the interpersonal relationships that are created within each dance performance, rather than a purely aesthetic evaluation of each work. It is through the interpersonal connections between dancer and viewer that change can come about, and the links created between perceptions of disability and dance

performance will provide the basis for the theoretical framework which will be proposed following the exploration of these performances.

### **3.2 GIMP: I like the way you move: bodies and performance as freak show**

The most primitive reactions to disability are contained in the belief systems that consider physical difference as monstrous, and those who embody such difference as freaks. For millennia, such bodies have been given marginalized roles in society, with organized occasions for display providing some of the contexts in which negative beliefs and stereotypes have been reinforced and developed (Garland Thomson, 1996). The freak show in its original form has been defined as 'the formally organized exhibition of people with alleged physical, mental or behavioural difference at circuses, fairs carnivals or other amusement venues' (Bogdan, 1996:25). This describes the familiar understanding of the freak show of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where people with physical anomalies provided entertainment through being displayed, often with a pseudo-scientific intent that allowed for voyeurism in the name of education.

In recent decades, there has been a transformation in the intent of freak show performance where the emphasis has shifted from degrading display to an interrogation of social and political stances regarding disability and the non-normative body. Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz offers a very useful definition of 'freak', stating that the person who is labeled freak is 'not an object of simple admiration or pity, but is a being who is considered simultaneously and compulsively fascinating and repulsive, enticing and sickening' (1996:56). This ambiguous response to bodily difference has been identified by Grosz as a threat to accepted ways of being that depend upon the binary oppositions of normal/abnormal. She argues that the categories defining normality in this way are breached by bodies that cannot be easily classified, resulting in the undermining of accepted modes of self definition.

It is this threat to the perceived integrity of the 'normal' body that gives rise to the objectification of any body that does not conform, and in this objectification, the body becomes a site for exhibition (1996:57). This is an underlying premise that causes modern day freak show performance to have questionable value. Even though the aim of this type of performance is to confront and deconstruct prejudice by re-imagining the notion of exhibiting different physicalities, this thesis contends that the reality is somewhat different because of the primitive responses that are inevitably awakened in the viewer by such an approach. (These responses, which have a neurological basis, will be explored in depth in Chapter Six.) The intent to highlight physical difference in order to remove the voyeuristic gaze paradoxically depends on that gaze being engaged in the first place, with all its attendant issues regarding preconceived notions of otherness.

Disability scholar Margret Shildrick (2002) has tried to circumvent this reality by arguing that the body of the freak has no intrinsic meaning in contemporary freak show performance other than as a vehicle for exploring societal change. She holds that interest in freak show intensifies at times of rapid social change when existing parameters of being are under scrutiny, and are no longer securely maintained within current belief systems. This argument is useful in defining the difference between traditional and modern day freak show, but it fails to recognize the continuing underlying voyeuristic desire to stare at difference in order to consolidate rather than reframe a secure sense of self as normative in the face of rapid change.

Culturally, there are deeply seated patterns of relating to disability that need to be interrogated in order to fully understand the difficulties inherent in using the freak show approach to redefine physical difference. Deconstructing the societal influences that first led to the emergence of this form of performance, and also to the subsequent subversion of the genre by disability activists, requires a complex unravelling of multiple elements.

Choreographer and dancer Heidi Latsky's *GIMP Project* (2008) provides a useful vehicle to interrogate the processes that has led to contemporary subversive freak show performance and also to examine the emergence of a spectatorship that has its roots in this genre, uncovering the inherent limitations within such integrated dance projects. The *GIMP Project* exemplifies a type of integrated performance that is a contemporary version of this type of freak display, aiming to subvert the notion yet somehow unwittingly remaining within the parameters of the original meaning.

In order to contextualize the whole notion of freak show performance, and to fully recognize the limitations that it inherently contains, the development of the disabled body as monstrous will now be explored, along with a historiological mapping of the construct of freak.

### **3.3 Evolution of the monster**

Prior to the Age of Enlightenment, there were three conceptualizations of disability that emanated from classical texts, all based on the notion of disability as monstrous. The word monster itself derives from the Latin noun *monstrum*, meaning portent or monster, which is a derivative of the verb *monere*, to warn, and is defined as a large, ugly and frightening imaginary creature, or a congenitally malformed or mutant animal or plant (OED). The use of the word 'monster', when applied to a physically different body, epitomized the dehumanization of anyone who did not comply with an accepted bodily norm.

Aristotle in his *On the Generation of Animals* (ca.350 BCE) understood physical disabilities as occasional errors of nature; he upheld the belief that female secretions somehow overpowered the male creative seed and resulted in a monstrous birth – that is, anything that was not a resemblance of the father (this included female infants<sup>xvii</sup>). He offered many theoretical explanations based on the biological knowledge available at that time to explain foetal abnormalities and subsequent physical disabilities. Cicero, on the other hand, considered

‘monstrous births’ as being portents of a god’s displeasure, the prodigies that heralded natural disasters or societal upheaval (*On Divination* 44 BCE). In his *Natural History* (ca. 77-79 CE), Pliny the Elder offered a third interpretation of difference. He considered ‘monsters’ to be wonders of nature encountered by travellers who ventured beyond the geographical boundaries of the world as it was then mapped. Previously unexplored lands, outside the realm of normality as contained within the known western world, were thought to be inhabited by races of monstrous beings with extraordinary physical attributes. In describing these monstrous variations of human life, Pliny recorded the blend of fact and fantasy that was prevalent at that time regarding half human, half beastly creatures such as the Blemmyae, one of the races of monsters believed to live at the very edges of the earth. (They were described as having no heads, but faces placed in the centre of their chests.) Pliny’s view of ‘monstrous beings’ represents a blending of the other two conceptualizations of physical difference, with science and fear of the unknown merging to create a negative portrayal of disability.

The notion of the monster played a role in defining boundaries and creating otherness in order to uphold the concept of conformity, normality, and safety contained within the known world. This is a theme that recurs again and again in philosophical thought throughout the ages and will be explored in more depth later on in this chapter.

In medieval times, disability continued to be largely shrouded in superstition and magical thinking. Some non Western interpretations reflected a societal belief in divine intervention, where difference was exalted as a way of being that reached beyond the realm of everyday life. In some cultures, children born with a disability were considered to be in closer connection with that society’s deity and as such, were believed to be a conduit to be used by others in order to access divine blessings. Like other historical readings of differing corporealities that continue to maintain a presence within contemporary thought, this form of belief manifested itself in recent years and attracted international attention. Lakshmi Tatma,

born into a rural family in the Indian state of Bihar in October 2005, was one of a pair of ischiopagus conjoined twins, with one head and torso, and two sets of limbs. The second twin had failed to fully develop and the two were surgically separated when Lakshmi was two years old. She had been named after *Lakshmi*, the Hindu goddess of wealth who is depicted with four arms, and the child was considered by many to be a reincarnation of the goddess, and consequently a source of good fortune and blessing. There were some very negative reactions from people in her locality to the surgery that separated Lakshmi from her conjoined twin, reactions which ultimately led to the family having to relocate many hundreds of miles away. It was considered an affront to the goddess that the extra limbs had been removed and so the child was perceived to have become a potential cause of bad luck. Regardless of the more positive interpretation of disability as divine blessing, the underlying acceptance was of disability as otherness, with the individual set apart from the community and having no inherent value other than in terms of community benefit.

However, the more common Western societal interpretation of otherness up until the mid seventeenth century was that disability was associated with malevolence rather than blessing, or as the result of divine retribution for transgressions against societal mores. Medieval artworks portrayed the perceived enemies of the Christian world with physical deformities as an expression of their sub human existence; immoral creatures lacking in civilized behaviours (Higgs Strickland 2003). The negative religious interpretations of disability were maintained by Protestant reformers throughout the reformation up until the end of the seventeenth century, by reinforcing this folk belief through the promulgation of popular broadside ballads that were on sale in marketplaces and at fairs, which spoke of monstrosity as being God's wrath at the sinfulness of mankind (Crawford, 2005). Monster shows continued to permeate all levels of society, from marketplace displays to the retaining of people with



physical anomalies within royal courts for entertainment purposes or as augurs for divine communications.

The existing understanding of disability as being monstrous became firmly entrenched within a scientific framework with the arrival of the Age of Reason, when the emerging emphasis on measurement allowed for physical difference to be objectified, with a new conceptualizing of embodiment within the binary normal/abnormal. The increased exploration of previously unknown continents converted the earlier interpretations of mythical and monstrous creatures as magical, into a scientific taxonomy of monstrous abnormality, a classification of difference as sub-human.

The taxonomy of the natural world was transformed by the work of Carl Linnaeus (1707-78), the father of modern day biological classification. Linnaeus published his *Systema Naturae*, a cataloguing of the animal kingdom, in 1758. In this work, he attempted to create a hierarchy of human life, maintaining the existing classical notion of European upper class intellectual supremacy. Linnaeus created a norm based on this ideal man, and placed other races and physicalities into lesser categories of *homo sapiens*. He named four racially based subspecies of *homo sapiens*, who demonstrated behavioural differences based on geographical location, in descending order of perceived civilization and rationality: for example, in his descriptions he stated *homo sapiens europaeus* was governed by laws, *homo sapiens americanus* was governed by customs, *homo sapiens asiaticus* was governed by opinions and *homo sapiens afer* was governed by impulse. Two further subdivisions were added, *homo ferus* and *homo monstrosus*. The creation of *homo ferus* reflected the seventeenth and eighteenth century interest in the reputed discovery of feral children and their domestication as an experiment in proving how European social values and languages were the basis of civilized life. At the lowest end of the hierarchy of human existence was *homo monstrosus*, a category for those with physical deformities whom Linnaeus believed were the linking life forms that

merged humanity with higher primate life as represented by apes, the very boundary of human and non-human.

The development of this scientific rationalization of difference became merged with the overarching belief system that used the notion of physical disability as monstrosity in order to symbolize evil and sinfulness. Aristotle's ideas regarding the supremacy of the male continued to influence scientific thought into the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and malformed foetuses were generally thought to be caused by maternal depravity or as the result of unnatural maternal imaginings and cravings.

The evolution of monstrosity and freak performance can be considered to have followed two different paths at this point in time. With the emergence of scientific measurement, the medicalization of differing physicalities began to appear and teratology metamorphosed from being a form of 'mythology relating to fantastic creatures' (OED) to becoming 'the scientific study of congenital abnormalities and abnormal formations' (ibid), the latter continuing to be the accepted use of the word. In parallel with the prevailing beliefs of disability as embodied evil, this specifically medical framework offered an alternative construction which brought about a paradigm shift from disability as the embodiment of evil to disability as an opportunity for spiritual salvation in the face of adversity, aided by the charitable acts of others. Monstrous bodies became the focus for control and containment within a medical structure that allowed for this benevolence (Turner, 2012). This construction of disability will be considered in the next section of the thesis, as it marks a significant divergence in thought regarding bodily differences. This is a somewhat artificial divide as received notions of physical disability have evolved from multiple sources that are closely intertwined, reflecting a complexity that cannot be easily untangled. However, by utilizing specific dance performances, the different strands of these intertwined conceptualizations of

disability can be clarified and explored. The focus for now will continue to be on *GIMP* and the development of freak show in popular culture as a means of containing monstrosity.

The connection between morality and embodiment ensured that disability remained firmly placed as an expression of evil in the communal psyche, in tandem with the emergence of the medical construction of disability. This archetypal use of disability as representative of evil has survived until the present day and has been widely studied within critical disability theory. For example, disability historian Paul Longmore (1997) identified three main stereotypes found within film and television: disability as a punishment for evil, disabled characters embittered by their fate and disabled characters who seek vengeance against non disabled people within the narrative. A similar pattern can be found in literature (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000). Within these constructions of normal/abnormal, bodily integrity is challenged by the presence of the freak, the accepted understanding of what it is to be human is brought into question and difference becomes intolerable. The only recourse is to see difference as the inverse of all that is wholesome and good, placing disability outside the realm of 'normal' life.

The monstrous body served this purpose within European medieval life, a position that can be linked to the notion of Carnival as theorized by Bakhtin (1984) who saw it as part of the regulatory process that maintained hegemonic order and upheld the existing hierarchical social system. His understanding of medieval Carnival provides a lens through which to look at a discourse of disability that recognizes the societal need to marginalize. This will now be explored as it is particularly relevant to the evaluation of the 'freak' perception that underlies the contemporary approach to this type of work.

Modern day freak show performance is the attempted destabilization of the notion of disability as monstrous, through the inherent confrontation between performer and spectator within the containment of the performance, comparable to the containment of Bakhtin's concept of Carnival. Carnival mirrors the ambiguity of the freak, as it both foregrounds

otherness in what could be interpreted as a negative sense, as well as providing the possibility of linking Carnival to the construct of liminal space (introduced previously, along with the notion of the grotesque) which allows for the positive elements of containment and transformation. The question now arises regarding these two elements of Carnival and liminality, as to whether they can provide a stepping stone towards achieving a position of integration in dance performance. Both will be now explored in more detail in order to apply the concepts to the performance of *GIMP* as an example of contemporary freak show.

### **3.4 Carnival and grotesque realism in transgressive performance**

Historically, there has always been provision for the body that transgresses the norm in relation to the structures that support a culture. Bakhtin's theories of Carnival and grotesque realism (1984) provide a very useful point of reference in trying to understand the role of freak show in both maintaining existing perceptions of disability, as well as paradoxically offering a potential means of subverting those perceptions. More recent interpretations of Bakhtin's theory of Carnival and the grotesque, based on the works of Rabelais, would argue that Carnival and grotesque realism played a role in defining and upholding existing social structures through the temporary suspension of prevailing cultural codes of behaviour (Emerson, 1997). Bakhtin himself believed that these periods of Carnival were a liberation from normal societal constraints where the vertical hierarchy was collapsed, creating an equality that allowed for growth and the possibility of change. A more cynical reading would argue that Carnival was a form of 'authorised transgression' that actually reinforced societal control (Morson, Emerson, 1989) and Bakhtin's view was naïve and idealistic in its expectation of growth and change. This is the interpretation that is most appropriate for a critical evaluation of contemporary freak show performance. However, there is the potential for integrated dance to fulfil the idealized Bakhtinian meaning of Carnival,

where existing perceptions of disability can be set aside in the liminal space of theatre performance that does not fall within the realm of freak show. *GIMP*, however, will be shown to be firmly placed as engendering a confrontational freak show approach, making transformative performance unrealizable, as the performance of *GIMP* upholds the position of the disabled body as grotesque.

The word ‘grotesque’ was derived from the Italian *grottesca* (with its root in the word *grotta*, meaning cave), the name given to a certain type of Roman ornament excavated at the site of Titus’ baths at the end of the fifteenth century. These ornaments did not represent reality but showed a level of artistic fantasy that blurred the boundaries between different life forms, paralleling Pliny the Elder’s understanding of wondrous beings. Gradually over the centuries, the term took on a more universal meaning and was applied wherever there was a need to express inventive freedom and to move from the prevailing point of view to a new outlook. This is the meaning intended by Bakhtin, not the current understanding of the word which is much narrower and has a more negative connotation. The Oxford Dictionary of English (2010) defines grotesque as comically or repulsively distorted; monstrous; unnatural. The more modern meaning has become synonymous with the freak show mentality of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Prior to the industrial revolution, although ‘monsters’ were used for display and entertainment, there was still an element of inclusion for people with disabilities within agrarian society, albeit at the bottom of the hierarchical scale. The pre-industrial way of life did not require that those considered unfit to be efficient units of production should be segregated from the rest of society. However, the notion of the leaky unrestrained body served a purpose within societal structure, allowing base humanity to have expression in a controlled fashion at certain times of the year. Regulation of this outpouring of base humanity meant that any physicality that transgressed the ideal could be acknowledged

but very carefully contained. Carnival in medieval society took place on designated days when the existing social order was reversed and there was a:

temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.  
Bakhtin, 1984:9.

These Carnival days acted as a safety valve for society, allowing the subordinated and the repressed to have a period of equality. The dichotomy between the spiritual and the material world was upheld throughout the year, the cerebral image of the cleansed, complete man was the ideal and anything outside this was considered base. The classical canon upheld the mind/body duality present since the early Greek philosophers, and church-dominated medieval society was structured on this duality. Natural bodily forces had to be contained and tamed in order to achieve higher contemplative thought and the rational was elevated over the corporeal.

During Carnival, there was an openness, a removal of all limits that normally restrained the physical body. Universality overcame individualism, the imperfect, open body with all its orifices and protuberances reached out to others and overcame the boundaries usually put in place in order to restrict all that was considered base: childbirth, urination, defecation, eating, drinking, and sneezing. Parody and Carnival laughter brought these usually hidden facets of humanity into the marketplace, to be acknowledged and celebrated by all participants. This was the body that had no clearly defined limits, the grotesque body, the body that was always incomplete, in the act of becoming, reflecting the cycle of birth/death/rebirth that underlies all societal organization. As historian Caryl Emerson states: ‘it is guaranteed triumph over classical form, institutional oppression, and individual death’ (1997:164).

Disabled bodies can be understood in terms of the grotesque within freak show performance. These are the bodies that transgress the boundaries of the ideal because they force an awareness of physical reality as opposed to pure spiritual idealism. There is a perceived lack of control and a consequent dependency that goes against the current cultural trends that

emphasize individuality, independence and personal control as a measure of self worth and value to society. The binary logic that is present in contemporary western society has created the cultural construct that pits ability against frailty. Placing disability on display within the original freak show structure reinforced the notion of the grotesque body that transgresses the 'normal' body. The subversion of freak show, as encountered in contemporary Carnavalesque freak show performances such as *GIMP*, gives an insight into the creation of choreography aimed at confronting societal perceptions of disability. These Carnavalesque elements of performance parallel medieval Carnival in that they attempt to be contained within a liminal space where existing societal structures may be held in abeyance.

There are two important factors here that have relevance for the application of Bakhtin's theories to integrated dance performance. Firstly, Bakhtin argues that grotesque realism in Carnival provides an opportunity for growth. He states: 'It has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one.' (1986:21). The temporary suspension of existing rules provides an opportunity to explore alternative understandings of the transgressive body, through not having to apply the parameters that would normally be in place. In the performance space, it should be possible to view integrated dance in a fresh light, without attempts at normalizing through reference or comparison to other forms of dance. This does not often happen however, perhaps because of the fact that many integrated dance performances are perceived as adopting an existing aesthetic based on specific physicalities and a training that requires these physicalities. In striving to emulate the norm provided by such an aesthetic, it is inevitable that integrated performance would fall short in any comparison.

Cooper Albright speaks of the contradictions contained in productions such as those by the American integrated dance company *Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels*, headed by dancer Mary Verdi Fletcher, a wheelchair user. By remaining within a ballet idiom, the company stays within a conservative aesthetic that 'reinforces, rather than disrupts, the

negative connotations of disability' (2001:60). As Cooper Albright points out, where an aesthetic of beauty, grace and line is internalized, even though this is 'not centered on a completely mobile body, it is nonetheless still beholden to an idealized body image' (2001:61). The ensuing comparison is inevitable between those dancers that have the potential to attain the idealized body image, and those that don't. In Latsky's use of walking patterns throughout *GIMP* where the choreographic use of gait is never developed beyond an apparent statement of difference, this element of comparison is very much present and as Garland Thomson states, it 'exemplifies the cardinal principal of enfreakment: that the body envelopes and obliterates the freak's potential humanity'. (1997:59). This places the disabled dancer in a position of being considered grotesque both in the Bakhtinian sense and also in the contemporary sense of the word, where transgression becomes embodied, and the possibility for growth and change is curtailed.

Bakhtin argued that Carnival also played another valuable role, for as well as offering 'the chance to have a new outlook on the world; to enter a completely new order of things' (1986:34), Carnival also allowed people to confront their fears. Bakhtin states that medieval and renaissance grotesque 'liberates the world from all that is dark and terrifying' (1986:47). When faced with the disorganized, disabled body that lacks control, the realization is evoked, and consequently the fear, that this embodiment is a possibility for everyone. Some level of infirmity is a probability, regardless of how much control the individual appears to have over his or her current physicality. Freak show gives containment to this fear, as Carnival did in previous eras. It allows the fear to be confronted in a very controlled and objectifying manner. By reducing the humanity of the person to freak as spectacle, the immediacy of the possibility of life that can be affected by infirmity is diluted and displaced. The power of this primordial fear cannot be underestimated, as Elizabeth Grosz states:



.... the freak is an *ambiguous* being whose existence imperils categories and oppositions dominant in social life. Freaks are those human beings who exist outside and in defiance of the structure of binary oppositions that govern our basic concepts and modes of self-definition.

1996:57

*GIMP* confronts this fear and at one point it is actually expressed verbally when a dancer directly addresses the audience. However, this approach has limited value because it only serves to bring fear to conscious awareness in a way that maintains the dichotomy between non disabled and disabled bodies. When the performance is discussed, it will become evident that difference is stared at and almost aggressively highlighted in a manner that reinforces the societal position of freak.

There is one other consideration regarding the use of Carnival and grotesque realism as a means of exploring freak show performance, and that is the fact that Bakhtin's theories are generally thought to require the complete involvement of all subjects without the division into spectator and performer. This thesis would argue that in a truly integrated theatre performance, the role of spectator is an active one that is based in intersubjectivity and as such, there is full involvement in the process of performing disability within a theatre dance work. The question now arises as to whether freak show performance allows for this level of intersubjectivity to be fully present. When the evolution of the notion of freak is combined with Bakhtin's reading of the societal significance of Carnival and grotesque realism, a framework is beginning to emerge that can be applied to a critical evaluation of dance that includes diverse physicalities. The final element that needs to be considered is the notion of liminality.

Anthropologist Victor Turner developed his understanding of liminal space (1969), providing a paradigm that is particularly relevant to understanding the significance of dance performance as potentially transformative. The notion of liminality has been theorized in many different forms and in keeping with the evolutionary approach to disability and dance performance, it will inform the developing argument of this thesis through the use of Turner's

understanding of liminality; philosopher Martin Buber's theorizing of the I/Thou relationship when the dialogic engagement between two people creates sacred space where possibility becomes actuality; and also in the more recent conceptualization of intersubjectivity within neurobiology.

This liminal space is essential for Carnival to occur. It is the space that allows for the presence of that which is outside the ordinary, away from the constraints of day to day life. In addition to Carnival and grotesque realism, liminality needs to be explored also, before applying these notions to inform the critical evaluation of the performance of *GIMP*.

### **3.5 From transgressive to transformative: the power of the liminal**

The disruption of existing belief systems can come about through understanding performance as a liminal act. The word liminality is derived from the Latin *limen* meaning threshold, and refers to 'a transitional phase, occupying a position on, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold' (OED). Turner (1987) recognized the importance of shared activities outside the normal everyday lives of a community.

Turner had begun his academic career as an anthropologist by studying the social mechanisms used in resolving social conflict within the Ndembu tribe of the former Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia (1969). He devised the notion of social drama to theorize the sequence of recognizing and dealing with social rupture, identifying four main stages within the process: the disruption of normal social interaction by an individual or group; an extension of the disruption leading to crisis; action taken by group leaders to contain or redress the disruption; and reintegration of the individual or group, or social recognition of the resulting change in norms when reintegration is not possible. This emphasis on process within social change was a precursor to his approach in examining the role of ritual in social structure. In 1963, Turner read *The Rites of Passage* (1909) written by French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep (1873-

1957), who created the term *rites de passage* to describe the transitional periods that mark the milestones of individual progression through the stages of life within a society. Each transitional period involves disengaging from normal social contact, taking part in specific rituals and then re-entering society with a changed status. In pre-industrial societies, this ritual separation from the group, in order to redefine the individual's identity and status, was an essential element in maintaining group cohesion and stability.

This work profoundly influenced the development of Turner's own theoretical stance. Process continued to be central to his understanding of the use of ritual in social interaction, but now Turner introduced the notion of liminality, based on van Gennep's reading of the process. Van Gennep had outlined three distinct phases within this ritual process: the pre-liminal phase where there is separation of the individual from existing social structures; the liminal phase that places the subject in a position of ambiguity, 'betwixt and between', no longer held by existing norms and structures but not yet bound by new structures; and post-liminal where the subject regains a level of equilibrium and new structures have been put into place that remove ambiguity and create a new order. Liminality became a core concept of Turner's work and he recognized the importance of shared activities outside the normal lives of a community. He spoke of the liminal space where ritual processes took place, a place and time marked by clear boundaries from the everyday, paralleled in contemporary society in the experience of attending a performance, whether it be in the theatre or at a football match. For him, the liminal was that space that no longer belonged to normal everyday existence; it was the space that facilitated growth and change.

### **3.6 Applying liminality to relationship**

A semiological approach to the relationship between dancer and spectator is grounded in the symbolic frameworks that shape interactions within day to day life. Narratives of being are assimilated that colour the perception of the other in terms of their social construction. Liminal performance requires that these constructions be set aside in order to free the spectator so that new understandings can be constructed. In order to apply this notion of liminality and potential societal change to the perception of the disabled body within professional dance performance, two elements need to be in place. Firstly, the aesthetic quality of the performance needs to be at a level that incorporates artistic rigour in order to avoid the pitfalls inherent in the creation of negative comparisons (as in integrated dance company *Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels*, for example, and also as examined in considering the artistic development of *Axis* and *CandoCo*); secondly, there needs to be an understanding of the dynamics of relationship between the spectator and dancer.

At present, the vast majority of performances which are labelled ‘integrated’, do not achieve an acceptable professional standard and are more in keeping with a community dance model of proficiency, where inclusion is the primary aim rather than artistic excellence. Adam Benjamin, a dance educator who has specialized in integrated dance, has done extensive work in raising awareness of the needs of people with disabilities within the genre of dance. He makes the point that often dance is presented that is ‘formalised and regimented, seeming to infantilise the dancers rather than empower them; the complexity and the uniqueness of the dancers’ movement remains untapped’ (Benjamin, 2002:68). This tends to reinforce the marginalization of disability as it reduces the participation of the disabled dancer to an adjunct of the able bodied performance. As already mentioned in relation to *Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels*, a large number of integrated dance companies still hold on to an aesthetic based on a traditional understanding of western theatre dance where artistic excellence is perceived in

relation to an existing canon. Maintaining an aesthetic based on non disabled dancers while trying to include those with disabilities can only perpetuate the divisive and exclusionary nature of such an approach. Consequently, it can be hypothesized that the power of liminality as a means of disconnecting preconceived notions of disability can only be fully realized where the performance itself does not reinforce existing stereotypical thinking.

When the evolution of the notion of freak is combined with Bakhtin's reading of the societal significance of Carnival and grotesque realism, along with liminality, a framework is provided that can be applied to a critical evaluation of dance that includes diverse physicalities. Having considered these underlying elements that can be read into this performance, the success or otherwise of *GIMP* as a contemporary subversion of freak show will now be explored.

### **3.7 GIMP: the Performance**

*GIMP* is a dance performance choreographed by Heidi Latsky, which premiered in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in November 2008 and has since toured internationally with a varying cast of dancers with and without disabilities. Latsky's choreographic works mirror her interest in expanding the boundaries of who can dance, a legacy of her own performance career where she was often involved in projects that explored the edges of professional dance. Indeed, her career started as a dancer with the Bill T Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, after which she formed a partnership with Larry Goldhuber, a dancer of very large physical proportions. In her own dance company, *Heidi Latsky Dance*, she has continued to explore dance that challenges the boundaries of traditionally accepted physicalities. A collaboration with disabled dancer Lisa Bufano in 2006 led to the development of *The GIMP Project*. Latsky's organizational vision statement for the project, as expressed on the *The GIMP Project* website, encapsulates her approach to dance and physical difference, where she states that she respects

and values all corporealities and consequent movement potential that can inform her choreography:

all bodies are recognised as viable, fascinating and expressive instruments; difference is upheld, not feared; increased understanding and communication take the place of isolation, alienation and lack of contact; people learn to "live in" their own skin and do not detach from their bodies because of external and internally assimilated judgments and conventional standards; one is encouraged to "own" one's body, value it and use it to be expressive and truthful in ways that are empowering, enriching and unique; a strong work ethic is valued and implemented; and a high standard of excellence is not only desired but is achieved through sustained work and focus.

Latsky, 2008

These words refer to and reveal an underlying social commentary that is based on exclusion. Latsky highlights the 'isolation' and 'alienation' that arise from physical difference; in doing so, she is clearly marking out her work as being an antidote to this way of thinking. As such, it represents a very necessary step in the development of inclusive dance internationally, where disabled bodies on stage confront the spectator with a declaration of difference, whether overtly or covertly. . Latsky has never claimed her work to be overtly 'integrated' and has never used that label, however her use of differently abled bodies within the choreography of *GIMP* sets her apart from mainstream professional dance in this aspect, and places this work in the category that has been designated 'integrated' The choreography itself aims to highlight difference and as such, it is making a statement with regard to physicality.

This approach to integrated dance can be dated back to the emergence of integrated companies in the 1970s and 1980s when dance was often used as a political statement in order to validate the embodiment of a disability identity. Historically, this focus was paramount and consequently dominated performance, privileging message over artistic content (Benjamin, 2002). What could be termed as 'confrontational style' can be clearly seen within the choreography of *GIMP*, which will be discussed later in greater detail, particularly in relation to the performance of one of the dancers, Lawrence Carter Long, a disability activist who had

not danced professionally until becoming part of the *GIMP Project*. Carter Long is a man with cerebral palsy whose distinctive gait is used as the basis for sequences that juxtapose his movement style with that of other non disabled dancers. He repeatedly walks in an angular floor pattern, sometimes alone, sometimes joined by other cast members. It is a leitmotif that recurs throughout the work and is woven into the choreography in a way that accentuates his palsied movement style. Yet, it is a choreographic leitmotif that does not appear to be an exploration and development of his movement, but rather a statement of difference in comparison to other walking styles contained within the choreography. These sequences only serve to emphasize the ascendancy of the idealized body in the way previously described in this chapter. As such, they reflect the political agendas of acceptance and validation often contained within integrated dance performances of the 1970s and 1980s, rather than an unfolding of a movement script where the dancer's embodied presence is the fundamental starting point. This is both representative and symptomatic of much of this work's choreographic intent.

What is somewhat problematic within the mission statement cited above are the notions that 'people learn to "live in" their own skin' and that 'one is encouraged to "own" one's own body' through being involved in this project. This reflects a rather ableist view of inclusion that comes from the premise of difference as transgressive. Latsky aims to create a dance experience that allows participants to be 'expressive and truthful in ways that are empowering', another phrase that could be interpreted as being contained within the parameters of ableist facilitation, where disabled dancers achieve agency through performance, an enactment of the 'heroic dancer' scenario that permeates so many integrated performances and takes precedence over all else. Latsky's objectives for working with disabled bodies, as contained within her mission statement, reflect an inherent acceptance of these disabling views

of corporeality that will inevitably curtail the potential for this work to move beyond the confrontational, despite her very well meaning intentions.

The use of the word ‘gimp’ in the title of the performance is a subversion of the contemporary use of the word, which has very definite derogatory overtones when applied to someone with a physical disability. Disability theorists David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2000:35) speak of the ‘transgressive reappropriation’ of offensive terms such as ‘gimp’, stating that:

ironic embrace of derogatory terminology has provided the leverage that belongs to openly transgressive displays. The power of transgression always originates at the moment when the derided object embraces its deviance as value.

(ibid)

In the programme notes for the performance at Alverno College, Milwaukee, (November, 2010), Latsky reminds readers that the original meaning of the word was far from the insult it has now become. It is defined as:

**GIMP:** *gimp* (gimp) 1. A ribbonlike, braided fabric. 2. Fighting *spirit*; vigor. 3. A lame person. 4. *Slang*; a halting, lame walk. 5. To turn, vacillate, tremble ecstatically.

Latsky uses this definition not only to signify the transgressive nature of *GIMP* but also to inspire the choreography of the work, and there are many examples of the recurrent theme of walking, repeated trembling movements throughout, along with an opening sequence of aerial dance where two dancers, one without legs, use a length of suspended ribbon-like red silk to support themselves. The multiple readings of the word are analogous with the application of the label ‘freak show’ to this performance.

Traditionally, freak shows objectified and dehumanized those on display but critical disability theory has used the label to identify contemporary performance that attempts to subvert the original dehumanizing aspects of such display. The very choice of the title by Latsky places her work within this parameter.



### **3.8 We've been watching you: subverting the gaze.**

*Gimp* is very much driven by a confrontational style and this permeates the work. It forces the spectator to watch the performance in terms of physicality, and specifically the physicalities of the dancers with disabilities. When interviewed about the performance by photojournalist Martha Rial, Latsky stated:

It is also about being watched, and that phenomena (sic) of knowing you are being watched, and watching people watching you. It's a pre-emptive strike. I'm a gimp and you're going to know that I know that that's who I am.

Latsky, 2011

*Gimp* is a rather unstructured performance in terms of composition, as dancers have been replaced over the course of its existence. This highlights one of the issues that must be addressed when choreography is created to match a specific physicality where the dancer has a disability. If the dancer with that specific physicality needs to be replaced, then the choreography will most likely have to be altered in order to facilitate a different movement vocabulary. As a result, quite significant changes can come about in the structure of the work. However, within *Gimp*, the underlying intent of the work remains intact and as Lawrence Carter Long is a disabled dancer who has remained as one of the most constant members of the cast throughout the work's life, his performance will be the main focus. His presence on stage makes use of both spoken word and movement in order to communicate the subversive elements contained in his performance. As there are some variations in different performances, the following critique is based on two performances of *GIMP*, the first of which took place at the Liverpool Playhouse on November 18<sup>th</sup> 2010 as part of the DaDaFest International 2010, and the second, a filmed recording of a performance which took place at The Helfaer Theatre, Milwaukee, on 28th January 2011 as part of the *Alverno Presents* series organised by Alverno College, Milwaukee. (This filmed performance was accessed online.)

*GIMP* begins with an aerial dance that acts as a prologue. Performers Jennifer Bricker and Nate Crawford created this sequence using a length of suspended red silk material

that supports and entwines them as they move. Latsky spoke of this dance as being somewhat unrelated to the rest of the work, but having been impressed by the two dancers' movement vocabulary, which incorporated Bricker's different physicality (she has no legs), Latsky was eager to include them in the project (private conversation, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2010). It is an interesting introduction to the work as it immediately places *GIMP* apparently within the realm of integrated dance that does not attempt to conform to a traditional dance genre. The use of the fabric reinforces the word 'gimp's multiple meanings, one of which is 'a ribbon like braided fabric', and accentuates Latsky's aim to confront the spectator with physical difference and the multiple connotations and interpretations of disability that can be found within an integrated dance work. The main body of the work can be loosely divided into several sections, which generally flow continuously with one blending into the next through the frequent use of overlap, both in the music and also through the choice of movement transitions that bring dancers on and off stage. The recorded soundtrack is an eclectic mix comprising of an original electronic soundscape created by a variety of musicians, interspersed with George Frideric Handel's aria 'Ombra mai fu' from the opera *Serse* (1738), a Cyndi Lauper (2003) version of Edith Piaf's song 'La Vie en Rose', an excerpt from Giovanni Battista Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* (1736) and *I Like the Way you Move*, a rock song by the band Bodyrockers (2005). A scrim is used at the beginning of the performance to create a veil between the audience and the dancers, with the intention of giving an experience of distance and dislocation. A montage of overlapping projected images increases the sense of dislocation during the opening dance sequence, as the images fleetingly appear at a speed that resists comprehension. There are glimpses of statuary, line drawings, disconnected objects and indistinct shapes, all in grayscale with very occasional splashes of orange and red. The dancers appear one by one creating a line across a dark, empty stage, standing motionless with all movement being provided by the frantic flow of projected images behind them. A rhythm of frozen stillness alternating with

gesture begins to develop, as if an open challenge to stare is being declared. The movement becomes more frantic, matching the driving rhythms of the percussion-led electronic score, yet the dancers remain more or less in place giving an oddly static, trapped feel to their dance. (See Appendix D, Fig. 1)

This sets the atmosphere for the work as there is a continuous use of moments of stillness throughout the performance, giving an impression of dancers as frozen exhibits accommodating the stare of the spectator. From the start, the choreography of *GIMP* highlights body parts and movement sequences that concentrate attention on physical difference, for example Carter Long's walk and Akemi Nishida's partially formed right forearm and hand. Nishida performs a solo that consists largely of gestural movements with her right arm, while holding her fully formed left arm out of sight behind her back. There is no subtlety in this choreography; it is openly provocative in style so that disability is foregrounded and dominant above all else. There is no artifice, no attempt to soften the immediacy of the disabled dancer's presence in *GIMP*, unlike traditional freak show, where barkers attracted an audience using a variety of persuasive techniques that gave permission to stare and objectify. Latsky's intent is most likely to strip back the cues that trigger an automatic learned response of avoidance upon seeing a differently abled body. The actuality of this choreographic decision is that disability becomes hypervisible above all else, and the dance becomes an expression of that hypervisibility.

The focus will now be placed on one specific short movement sequence followed by a monologue, as it captures the essence of *GIMP* as an attempted subversion of freak show. The sequence is performed by three dancers, Nishida, Carter Long and a non disabled dancer, Meredith Fages. The dance is choreographed to the track *I Like the Way You Move* performed by the Bodyrockers<sup>xviii</sup>. Parody and irony are fundamental elements of modern day subversive freak show and the choice of song lyrics could be interpreted as an expression of irony when

used in this context of confronting disability. Latsky also employs this ironic approach to the use of language at several other points throughout the performance. When the song lyrics are coupled with the accompanying choreography, the spectator's gaze is inevitably drawn primarily to the disabilities of two of the dancers, particularly Carter Long's unusual gait. Carter Long and Nishida dance as a duo, with Fages moving almost in counterpoint to the duo's dance, emphasizing her difference as being the 'normal' body. The song begins with a spoken segment and consists of a list of loveable traits: 'I like the way you, look at me with those beautiful eyes, I like the way you, act all surprised'. Carter Long and Nishida stand still facing each other, downstage centre, with Nishida's back to the audience. As the melody builds in the background to the spoken word, Carter Long and Nishida shift slightly, so they now are sideways on to the audience continuing to face each other, motionless. The next shifting movement brings them side by side, holding hands and facing upstage with their backs to the audience, thus providing an opportunity for the spectator to view their bodies from all angles, like slowly rotating objects of display.

At this point, Fages crosses downstage in a series of up tempo turns and leaps that contrast sharply with the minimal movements of the other two dancers. Her movements are almost balletic in quality and immediately create a rift in the visual field, with her speed and fluidity appearing in opposition to the duo's immobility. The final lines of the spoken opening verse 'I like the way you, like to touch, I like the way you, stare so much, but most of all' lead to a crescendo of sound as the volume of the instruments explodes with the sung chorus line 'I like the way you move'. Carter Long simultaneously bursts into action after the extended stillness of the preceding few moments and begins to walk upstage with long strides. As he repeats the earlier pattern of walking in straight lines, he is shadowed by Fages as he crosses from one side of the stage to the other, her swift turning movements again in sharp contrast to his flexed kneed walk. Carter Long rejoins Nishida upstage right and an awkward tussle that

has an aggressive undertone ensues, ending in both their bodies swaying in unison as they caress each other, slowly raising their joined hands in the air. This slower movement is mirrored by Fages who executes a deep plié downstage left. This has the effect of appearing to reference Carter Long's permanently flexed knees which make his stance and walk so distinctive, giving the impression of him being in a perpetual demi plié. Inevitably, a comparison based on the idealized dancing body is inescapable.

The sequence continues with Nishida and Carter Long holding hands while repeating the walking pattern but this time at a greater speed, which gives a loping quality to Carter Long's movement with Nishida leading him around the stage in a manner reminiscent of a mother with a toddler in tow who is struggling to keep up. As Fages simultaneously exits the stage with a series of unexpected little runs reminiscent of *courus en demi pointe* (another visually strong comparative moment in terms of the two contrasting movement styles), Carter Long and Nishida return to downstage centre, facing the audience where they remain in stillness for several moments. Again they repeat the pattern of raising and lowering their joined hands and arms, turning to face each other as they did to begin the sequence. As they start to caress each other, the opening words of the song are repeated 'I like the way you, like to touch, I like the way you, stare so much'. The caresses are emphasized by both dancers synchronously swaying their hips, which has the visual effect of looking like a rather lascivious lurch although most likely the intention was to convey a sense of intimate sensuality, or perhaps raw passion. Unfortunately, the movement choices within this excerpt do not seem to create a sense of interpersonal relationship between the dancers, but rather set the disabled dancers apart as 'other', so there is no sense of emotional connection linking the three, let alone with the spectator, beyond the provocative challenge of witnessing movement that has difference as its primary focal point.

In all this choreography, it is Nishida's right arm and hand that are used with her left arm and hand hanging loosely by her side, giving prominence to the non-typical limb. The repeated moments of stillness, particularly when Nishida and Carter Long move through the sequence of turning in each direction so that all aspects of their bodies can be viewed and studied, provide the spectator with the opportunity to stare at length. This objectification of their bodies can be understood in terms of subversion and an attempt to face difference full on, but it is a choreographic device that somehow backfires and rather than providing an empowering experience for dancer and spectator, it stays trapped in a hybrid version of disability as freakish, and monstrous body as specimen.

Colette Conroy states that 'freaks are made in performance through the establishment of freak and spectator, and there is a process of cultural consensus involved in their creation'. (2008:342). Despite intending the opposite, *GIMP* supports this view of disability through the inability of a freak show approach to fully transcend the objectifying stare which is laden with cultural undertones. As Conroy states, 'The freak is a confluence of cultural significations and is formed by spectatorial response' (2008, p.345). *GIMP* encourages a response that is limited to the confrontational and cannot get beyond this.

The failure to provide a transformative experience is compounded by the ensuing sequence in the performance of *GIMP*; as the song dies away the cast rejoin Carter Long and Nishida onstage, creating a line with Carter Long placed in front, facing the audience. He then enters into a monologue that is provocatively constructed of comments made by audience members following earlier performances (information shared by Latsky in private conversation, 19<sup>th</sup> November 2010))<sup>xix</sup>. Among the comments are statements such as 'I don't know about them, but I think you're beautiful, I think you're really beautiful', 'it's been an honour and a privilege', 'I thought you were going to be weird, but you're not'. Each statement is an inversion of prevailing constructs that provide a negative view of disability; ugliness,

powerlessness, invisibility / hypervisibility, and condescension. In addressing the audience, Carter Long is giving himself the opportunity to stare back and to engage in a role reversal that aims to highlight stereotypical views of disability. The monologue addresses audience prejudice by acknowledging their need to deny innate reactions brought about by the freak show format of *GIMP*, replacing these reactions with statements that fall into the category of disability as tragedy to be overcome by the heroic victim. ‘The way you do it, it's like you're standing at the edge of a cliff’ is a very telling quote, projecting a spectatorial response onto the dancers and their performance, of imminent danger before a leap into the unknown. There is recognition of fear and the potential for shame at being involved in the voyeuristic gaze.

This is reminiscent of Bakhtin's notion of the Carnavalesque containment of fear, where the transgressive body can exist temporarily without being objectified as a defence against human vulnerability. However, this temporary state only succeeds in fortifying the position of otherness. Each statement made by Carter Long reinforces the notion of disability as transgressive through the use of inversion, and does not offer an alternative construction to the act of staring at each dancer's disabilities. It is this persistent emphasis on foregrounding the dancers' disabilities that undoes the potential value of this work as transformative. *GIMP* has worth in the fact that it ‘outs’ disability in a forthright way but unfortunately, it does not offer a development from this confrontative position. In fact, it remains firmly entrenched in a placing that disallows the potential for growth offered by liminality, as it confirms disability as otherness and awakens and strengthens the semiological responses it is trying to undo. There is no possibility of a transformative ‘betwixt and between’ space when the dancers are so clearly cast in the gimp/freak role that continues to objectify.

Mitchell and Snyder have critically examined the scholarly study of freak show and the attempt to appropriate the freak as a legitimate site for developing critical disability theory. They argue that many scholarly investigations only manage to ‘falsely operate as a form of

domestication' (2005:2) where there is 'containment of freak difference by forwarding freaks as safe objects of academic enquiry' (ibid). Mitchell and Snyder also state that 'these resuscitations of the past revivify the original objectification ... there is no cathartic recovery of 'disability' through freak show recreations' (2005:5). Here they are referring directly to disabled artist Mat Fraser's documentary *Born Freak* (2002) in which Fraser undertakes a personal exploration of the history of freak show performance and contextualizes his own deconstruction of an earlier twentieth century freak show act, *Sealo the Seal Boy* (Stanley Berent, 1899-1980). Fraser shares the same physical condition of phocomelia (very short arms) that defined Berent's physicality as entertainer in a freak show setting. Like *GIMP*, Fraser attempts to subvert existing perceptions of disability through his performance as freak, but he encounters the same limitations that were present in Latsky's work. Corporeal difference is emphasized to the extent that the otherness of disability becomes dominant in the desire to confront prejudice, so that the viewer has no choice but to remain positioned in an ambiguous voyeuristic gaze that negates the subjectivity of the performer.

Kuppers agrees with this reading of Fraser's work, stating that in his role as freak he 'represents a realm in which the contradictions of conflicting cultural norms are played out ... As such, the freak holds a position of fascination and power, but not of structural disruption.' (2002:46)

Their arguments are particularly applicable to *GIMP*, as spectators are being asked to 're-enter a compromised space of gazing' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2005:7) in order to destabilize the concept of disability that had been sustained within earlier freak show performance. The invitation to stare that was inherent in nineteenth century freak show does not translate well into contemporary performance as they point out, because all that is left is a detached sociological perspective, staring 'in the name of politicized enlightenment' (2002:8).



There is no way that the objectifying shadow of earlier freak show can be obliterated when prurience is being replaced by politically correct staring that is in itself flawed.

*GIMP* is a brave attempt to choreograph physical difference in a provocative and challenging manner, but in doing so it has restricted the possibilities for a full exploration and appreciation of movement vocabularies that expand existing norms. Because of the confrontational nature of the work, spectators are placed in a position of having to stare through a filter that awakens all inherent pre-existing notions of disability as aberration. This was a necessary choice for choreographers in the nineteen sixties and seventies when the disability rights movement was in its infancy and although there is still a long way to go in the advancement of disability rights and disability awareness, there are other options within dance which can act as effective agents of change without referencing freak show and marginalization.

When considering the performance as an expression of Carnival with the possibility of change, it is clear that the Bakhtinian concept of societal growth cannot occur in these circumstances. The constant intrusion of confrontative verbal and embodied statements of difference denies the viewer the opportunity to move beyond this point of contact. In other performances mentioned, the choice of pre-existing dance canons only serve to try to normalize differing corporealities in a setting that inevitably leads to unfavourable comparison. *GIMP* replicates this problem by the choreographic choices that foreground perceived 'normal' and 'abnormal' movement patterns in a comparative manner.

The interpersonal connectivity that is awakened by *Gimp* is firmly fixed at a base level that does not encourage equality within relationship. Through the placement of the disabled dancer as one who is directly challenging the viewer in the act of viewing, embodied difference becomes the negating focus of the performance. Consequently, a primitive fear response is awakened that reminds the viewer of the need to objectify in order to protect his or

her position as 'normal'. This leads to a level of ambiguity where the viewer has acknowledged fear through the act of viewing; this is defended against by placing the dancer in the position of 'grotesque' which then offers a safe containment for the threat made to a binary understanding of subjective integrity. A dangerous position has been created that offers no clear path to transformative experience. This is the most rudimentary step towards an integrated understanding of corporeal difference and it will be theorized further in terms of interpersonal neurobiology in the next section of this thesis. A more evolved form of viewing will now be explored through an examination of the disabled dancer as heroic victim, as contained in *Diagnosis of a Faun*, a work by choreographer Tamar Rogoff (2009).

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<sup>xvii</sup> ‘Some, though resembling none of their relations, yet do at any rate resemble a human being, but others are not even like a human being but a monstrosity. For even he who does not resemble his parents is already in a certain sense a monstrosity; for in these cases Nature has in a way departed from the type. The first departure indeed is that the offspring should become female instead of male; this, however, is a natural necessity.’ Aristotle Book 4 Section 3 *The Generation of Animals* trans. Platt, Arthur 2005 eBooks@Adelaide The University of Adelaide Library, University of Adelaide, South Australia.

<sup>xviii</sup> The complete lyrics of the song *I Like the Way You Move* by Dylan Burns and James Kaz are as follows:

There's so many things I like about you, I..  
I just don't know where to begin,

I like the way you, look at me with those beautiful eyes,  
I like the way you, act all surprised,  
I like the way you, sing along,  
I like the way you, always get it wrong,  
I like the way you, clap your hands,  
I like the way you, love to dance,  
I like the way you, put your hands up in the air,  
I like the way you, shake your hair,  
I like the way you, like to touch,  
I like the way you, stare so much,  
but most of all....  
Yeah..  
most of all....

I like the way you move.....

Lyrics from: <http://www.lyricsforsong.net/> accessed January 2012.

<sup>xix</sup> The complete monologue, as performed by Carter Long at Alverno College, 2011, is as follows:

I've just gotta tell you I've been watching you, we've been watching you for the last twenty to twenty five minutes or so. I don't know about them, but I think you're beautiful. I think you're really beautiful. Absolutely stunning. I was told this was going to be an incredible experience but never in my wildest dreams did I imagine this. This has moved me. This has really changed me. It has been an honour and a privilege to have the time and space to stop and really look at you. To really see you. I've got to rethink this whole thing. This is not what I expected. I expected this to be weird, I thought you were going to be weird. But you're not. The way you do it, it's like you're standing at the edge of a cliff, it's like you're at the edge of the diving board and you just jump right off! It's so full on, I've never seen anything like that before, I mean wow! What I first thought was a risk is really an opportunity.



## Chapter Four

### ***Diagnosis of a Faun: the medicalization of disability***

#### **4.1 Introduction**

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the disabled body as freak has provided a template for the understanding of disability as ‘other’, an existence that resides outside the margins of a physicality based on the classical ideal, and consequently one that may be seen as less than human. With the advent of the industrial age and the subsequent development of a constructivist view of society, differing physicalities became problematic in a new way, as the focus had now become firmly fixed on how bodies could be defined in terms of environmental factors and scientific measurement rather than the classical ideal (Tremain, 2005). During the second half of the eighteenth century the emergence of prescribed norms, achieved through statistical analysis, brought about a fundamental change in how society viewed the individual. Health and wellness became linked with a statistical understanding of normality, leading to an interpretation of bodily differences as indicative of ill health in need of medical classification and intervention (ibid).

In this chapter, the medicalization of disability will now be explored in relation to dance performance. Choreographer Tamar Rogoff’s work *Diagnosis of a Faun* (2009) offers a valuable site for examining the intersections of three key elements at this point in the evolution of integrated dance. The first element is the theoretical notion of the medical model of disability, both in its history and in its continuing influence within contemporary life. The second element is the performance of disability as a pathology to be treated and either cured, normalized or contained through medical intervention. Finally, the third element is the valorization of the disabled performer as transcending the perceived limitations of disability.

In light of these considerations, *Diagnosis of a Faun* could be thought of as a progressive step in the evolution of integrated dance in that it moves beyond the notion of contemporary performance as a vehicle for the deconstruction of the disabled body as monstrous freak, which was clearly the intent of *GIMP*. However, it does bring into question the continuing influence of the medical model of disability in western society, the negative implications inherent in this model, and how these perceptions of disability can be reflected and reinforced in a dance work. Where Latsky was very overt in her desire to confront and deconstruct the notion of freak in *GIMP*, Rogoff had not stated an agenda regarding any political intent behind her choreographic decisions in the creation of *Diagnosis of a Faun*. The work was created as a result of exploring the dance and movement potential of a differently abled body. The resulting work and consequent reactions to it have inadvertently provided a very effective means of critiquing the medical model of disability.

The work was conceived after Rogoff attended a performance of *Romeo and Juliet*<sup>xx</sup> in which actor Gregg Mozgala played the male lead role. She was intrigued by his performance and his atypical physical abilities, and she consequently wanted to create a work that would allow her to explore his movement vocabulary in greater depth.

Mozgala was born with cerebral palsy which has affected the lower part of his body, giving him a gait which he described when interviewed as ‘like a human velociraptor...my knees were going in, my hips were totally rotated inward, Gravity was just taking me down. So my upper body – arms and chest – overcompensated, curling back and up’ (Genzlinger, 2009). In Rogoff’s own words ‘I didn’t know what I was going to do for him but I just knew he was inspiring to me’ (ibid). The use of the word ‘inspiring’ immediately raises questions regarding the potential motivations of the choreographer. It is an extremely emotive word when used in the context of Disability Studies, as it often refers to the perception that disability is a condition to be overcome by an individual in order to be fully participant in

normal life. The perceived struggle to surmount physical limitations is often interpreted as ‘inspiring’ by those without disabilities, creating an expectation of stoic suffering and transcendence from a position of deficit on the part of the disabled person (Kuppers, 2003). This is a notion that will be developed at a later point in this chapter in relation to the medical model’s belief in the need for the rehabilitation of the disabled body both at an individual and at a societal level.

Mozgala and Rogoff began working together and the original intention of creating a short ten-minute study transformed into a collaboration that extended beyond the year that it took to devise *Diagnosis of a Faun*. The work in itself is interesting because of the narrative chosen by Rogoff. Set in a hospital, it focuses on two parallel occurrences, the rehabilitation and transformation of a young ballet dancer with a ruptured Achilles tendon, and the simultaneous discovery of a five thousand year old faun at the same hospital who is to undergo the same surgery, which in turn provides a counter-narrative of scientific exploration of the exotic and unknown.

The theme of medical and surgical intervention in this work is an extremely useful vehicle with which to explore the divergent approaches to two different physicalities. It makes it possible to deal with the topic both in a metaphorical way as contained within the narratives of the actual performance of the work, and in real life because of the media interest that was sparked as a consequence of the training techniques devised for Mozgala by Rogoff. As will be discussed, these were given a transformative and rehabilitative significance by the press. The training methods used in the creation of the work, and their consequent effects on Mozgala’s physicality, became the main focus of media attention and as such they provide a fascinating insight into the insidious need to medically repair disability in contemporary life.

The confluence of metaphor and reality gives rise to an apt combination of the complex elements present in a medicalized view of differing corporealities. The ballet dancer’s

performance of acquired disability with the possibility of reparation, juxtaposed with the exploration of a 'deviant' body in the shape of a faun, is reflective of the inherent ambiguities in this model of disability. The faun represents an otherness that embraces all the unruly and unknowable aspects of a corporeality that is outside the norm, whereas the ballet dancer epitomizes an embodiment of the ideal, the sylph. Her temporary state of disability could be understood as representative of the innate societal fear of bodily dysfunction that gives rise to the objectification and rejection of the disabled body, as already examined in the previous chapter (Grosz, 1996).

Before critically analyzing the performance of Rogoff's work and the subsequent media response, the rise and historical influence of the medical model of disability will be examined in order to contextualize this work in terms of corporeal integration. Paradoxically, rather than totally excluding physical difference as monstrous and outside the boundaries of perceived normality, the medical model of disability simultaneously sought both to contain and to exclude. A perverse form of containment of disability within the parameters of normality was accomplished by viewing it as illness that had the potential to be somewhat normalized through medical intervention and rehabilitation. Failing this, the institutionalization of those with disabilities offered an exclusion from 'normal' society whilst providing almost total control over such bodies (Hughes, 2005).

## **4.2 Historical Background**

With the coming of the industrial revolution, a monumental shift in philosophical thought influenced the very structure of society throughout the western world. The introduction of the statistical notion of 'average' replaced the previous striving for perfection based on a concept of the ideal. The rationale of regulating the social presence of any body that did not



conform to the average became an intrinsic element in the development of social theory (Tremain, 2005, Hughes, 2005, Snyder and Mitchell, 2006).

Following the Industrial Revolution, the drift from rural to urban life brought about a breakdown in the existing social order. The resulting dislocations in both societal structure and physical environment had a negative effect on disability in a manner that had not previously existed. Social connections, which had formed the fabric of everyday rural life, were disrupted and there was a resultant loss of a communal sense of belonging as more people moved to urban industrial centres. Where there had been the possibility of integration for people with disabilities within an agrarian social system, even though at the lower levels of each social constellation, in an urban setting the natural rhythms of the seasons no longer provided structure for communal cohesion based on agricultural work. This was now replaced by the artificiality of a mechanical regime that adhered to schedules aimed at maximizing production with little or no regard for the human element of the process. This new emphasis on the individual as a unit of production within an industrial setting left people with disabilities as effectively worthless (Finkelstein, 1993).

The growing prominence of rationality and scientific certainty began to influence developments in philosophical and social thought. There was an increasing value placed on the 'expert' knowledge of skilled as opposed to unskilled workers and as the notion of measurement began to take hold more widely with the introduction of statistics, the binary normal/abnormal came into being and the ability to conform to a notion of 'average' became more desirable. Instead of a continuum of corporeality that was accepting of variation, bodies were now more clearly defined as acceptable or unacceptable (Snyder and Mitchell, 2006).

Migration to urban centres also introduced a new way of life that reflected an increased mobility and consequently, a more fluid and transient connection with others. Uniformity and regulation created new constructions of interaction, leaving behind the old

support networks based on communal interdependence. Identity became more focused on physical attributes as the anonymity resulting from the higher population levels of urban life was steadily replacing the relatively limited, contained social sphere offered by life in a rural community.

Bodily appearance provided the means of categorizing others according to skills, social status and functionality in a world that privileged physical ability as cultural currency. Garland Thomson argues that the process of industrialization reconstituted the human body. She states:

Mechanical practices such as standardization, mass production, and interchangeable parts promoted sameness of form as a cultural value and made singularity in both products and bodies seem deviant.

1996: 11

This new interpretation of the deviance of the disabled body added to previously existing perceptions, consequently creating a more complex conflation of corporeal difference with lack of moral sentience, where productivity became an added measure of human value. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, visual observation became a fundamental aspect of scientific truth. Together with medical diagnosis, it provided a means of looking that was considered objective in its ability to categorize and classify difference. When the disabled body was the subject of that looking, the emphasis became firmly placed on a scientific interpretation of pathology and associated deviance in a way that reflected the desire to control. The medical gaze that evolved at this time could be considered a form of ‘institutional vision ... medical scientific looking (that) can be wielded only by those with appropriate authority and credentials.’ (Garland Thomson, 2009:29). The ascendancy of the medical profession in its role of defining and controlling embodied difference had begun.

The new science of teratology was becoming an established means of maintaining disability as transgressive. As already discussed, teratology itself was emerging from earlier beliefs that congenital abnormalities occurred as a result of such things as malign

maternal imagination, or the effect of external evil influences on the mother either causing an abnormal pregnancy or transforming a normal foetus into a monster. There was an increasing awareness of biological causes for such abnormalities and this heralded the imminent shift of disability from the realm of street entertainment to the realm of medical theatre, a term which broadly defines ‘the places and practices that surround demonstration as a method of dissemination of medical knowledge’ (Kuppers, 2003:38).

For much of the early and mid nineteenth century both the magical and the scientific views of disability continued to hold sway simultaneously. Disability as voyeuristic entertainment however was now more likely to be framed as quasi-scientific enquiry that would educate the spectator rather than the previous notion of disability as monstrous spectacle (Bogdan, 1988). Despite teratology increasingly offering physiological arguments that those with congenital anomalies were in fact human while presenting with biological variation, there was a continuing belief in corporeal difference as being an indicator of subhuman, morally dissolute existence and so undeserving of any form of equality.

The new concept of normality based on statistical measurement<sup>xxi</sup> began to influence social and political thinking. In nineteenth century France, civil law regulated that the physical shape of the human head, and the regularity of the cranial and facial features in particular, determined whether or not a person was fully a human being with civil and juridical rights. Links were made between social and criminal deviancy and corporeal anomalies, a belief that ultimately led to an increase in legislation that regulated the exhibition of disabled entertainers in sideshows and music halls (Snigurowitz, 2005:174).

Parisian Professor of Clinical Surgery, Paul Broca (1824-80) attempted to classify humans through anthropometric measurement with the premise that racial origin would determine mental ability. His original hypothesis, that he could determine a racial hierarchy by analyzing the ratio of radius to humerus measurement (the longer the forearm, the more ape-

like), was disastrous when his results showed that the white European ranked lower than several dark skinned racial groups. An amended hypothesis based on a study of skulls in order to demonstrate that cranial capacity was determined by social class also came to a disastrous end as anomalous results failed to support his theory.

Although these examples relate to racial and social differences rather than disability per se, they are indicative of the negative outlook towards any corporeality that did not adhere to the notion of European, white male, non-disabled ascendancy that was prevalent at this time. As Snyder and Mitchell point out ‘disability categories proliferate as an increasing value is placed upon bodily homogeneity, concepts of quantifiable health measurement, and the workplace standardization of capacities.’ (2006:23).

Reason and the accumulation of knowledge were considered to be the prime elements necessary for the development of philosophical thought that would improve society morally, socially, and materially in this era of immense change. The invention of machines to do the work of men effectively reduced the need for time to be spent at manual labour, thereby creating the opportunity for more cerebral pursuits during this newly acquired leisure time. There was a huge increase in the availability of educational activities for the general public and science was offering the possibility of mastery over nature, as new discoveries gave hope of greater control over the ills of humanity.<sup>xxii</sup>

One of the most negative aspects of this burgeoning scientific and industrial age was the commodification of man and the consequent value system that emerged. For example, the surge in the number of people with acquired disabilities due to industrial accidents brought about a significant change in the law in America. Where previously there had been a common law precedent that made masters liable whenever a servant was injured in the course of duty, a new law was passed that treated employer and employee as autonomous subjects. Consequently, this had the effect of relieving the employer of financial liability in any

circumstance involving industrial accidents, as the market wage was considered to include compensation for any risk of injury (Young Welke, 2010).

Such changes in legislation reflected the shift from familial and shared communal responsibility for individuals within social groups, to an emphasis on control and exclusion through objectifying taxonomies of the body that ultimately created a deficient population (Snyder and Mitchell, 2006). Consequently, newly disabled workers had no alternative other than to seek support from charitable organizations, as gaining monetary compensation from employers was extremely difficult. This effectively removed the worker from the marketplace and relieved the state of any responsibility for his or her economic situation, thus transforming a 'productive' member of society to a position of dependency and implied indolence (Garland Thomson, 1997:49).

The increased surveillance and regulation of disability became a trend throughout Europe and America, leading to the introduction of incarceration of people with disabilities, the creation of the so-called Ugly Laws in several American cities and states, and ultimately the eugenics movement of the early twentieth century (ibid). The Ugly Laws are of particular interest, as they specifically dealt with the act of looking and how that could be detrimental to the viewer when the object of his or her gaze was deemed unacceptable (Schweik, 2009). The first American Ugly Law came into effect in San Francisco in 1867 and was originally aimed at reducing the numbers of beggars on the streets, numbers that had vastly increased with the advent of industrialization. The employability potential for workers with physical disabilities was drastically reduced as machinery replaced human labour, and those who were not able to conform to the rigid sets of criteria necessary for the efficient running of manufacturing industries were often left without a means of income other than begging.

The Ugly Laws were introduced to tackle this problem but the actual wording of the San Francisco city ordinance, however, was much more specific in terms of what should

be viewable and what needed to be removed from the public gaze. The city's officials tried to differentiate between those considered unsightly from those that were infirm, based on whether or not the bodily difference was considered a moral transgression. Infirmity was much more acceptable in terms of the common good, whereas differing corporealities represented deviance and implied moral turpitude. Because of the inevitable outcome of this decision, people with disabilities found begging on the streets were often incarcerated in the newly built almshouses. Again, the continuation of a belief system that focused on the conflation of disability with deviance was woven into the fabric of society, in a manner that maintained an exclusionary mindset and placed the disabled body in a position of abjection.

The Ugly Law ordinance appeared in several other cities throughout America over the next few decades, with some variation in wording but essentially all carrying the same message. In 1911, Chicago introduced the following version:

No person who is diseased, maimed, mutilated or in any way deformed so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object or improper person to be allowed in or on the public ways or other public places in this city, or shall therein or thereon expose himself to public view, under a penalty of not less than one dollar nor more than fifty dollars for each offense.

Chicago Municipal Code, Sec. 36034. 1911

Although rarely enacted in more recent years, these codes were only finally removed from all city ordinances as late as the 1970s (the Chicago ordinance being the final one to be repealed in 1976).

In parallel with the introduction of the Ugly Laws, the ethical belief that those without disabilities could hold the high moral ground as providers of charitable benevolence was reinforced by the provision of almshouses funded by private contributions (Schweik, 2009, Snyder and Mitchell, 2006). Charitable works on behalf of those deemed less fortunate became a measure of material success and social ascendancy, an important aspect of life in a society where class distinctions were becoming more complex and hierarchical mechanisms such as

charity would provide clearer boundaries between social acceptance and rejection (Snyder and Mitchell, 2006). This convergence of socio-political beliefs and actions reflected a significant change in how differently abled bodies were viewed. The perceived inefficiency and resultant devaluation of the disabled body, coupled with the binary normal/abnormal which was now being absorbed within medical science along with the desire to achieve mastery over nature's irregularities, placed disability in a transgressive position, outside the dominant value system, and consequently considered to be even more in need of regulation and correction. The sphere of medicine was becoming even more powerful in providing a method of control that could be based on scientific principles that interpreted corporeal difference as pathological deficit (Kuppers, 2003).

The increasing influence of scientific thought gradually brought about a divergence between freak show and the medical performance of disability, as medical science carried a greater influence in terms of respectability and social status. Freak show became more the domain of the working classes whereas the appropriation of disability within medicine had much more status with the newly emerging middle classes. There was some continuing overlap as medical scientists continued to use freak show performers as subjects of investigation in order to examine and explore differing corporealities. Meanwhile, freak show organizers began to include medical jargon when describing their exhibits, in order to give credence to the performers as being authentic specimens of biological difference at the borders of human/sub human, bringing about a shift from monstrous spectacle to pathologically abnormal (Garland Thomson, 1997:76). This distinction between normal and abnormal:

set(s) in place the dualistic logic that legitimates the invalidation of people on the grounds of bodily difference from a medically fabricated norm and, furthermore, valorizes a regime of truth in which impairment offends against the biological laws of nature.

Hughes, 2005:82

The emergence of poorhouses and institutions designed specifically to incarcerate those with disabilities was a direct result of this logic and consequently, disabled bodies were removed

from everyday view and hidden behind the walls of these institutions, leading to a growing invisibility of such invalidated people. Because of this, the act of looking itself became tacitly proscribed, the hypervisibility of freak show was essentially being inverted and disability was becoming invisible (Garland Thomson, 1997, Snyder and Mitchell, 2006).

By the beginning of the twentieth century, freak shows were very much on the wane and physical disability became the domain of medical interventions. In their most extreme form, these were based on the principles of eugenics, which had emerged as a result of Darwinian theories of evolution being linked with Mendelian theories of heredity and the new science of statistical analysis. Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911) is perhaps the best known of the early eugenicists and in his work *Hereditary Genius* (1869:1) he states that ‘it would be quite practicable to produce a highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations’. It was believed by the advocates of eugenics that the manipulation of the genetic pool through forced sterilizations, abortions and euthanasia would ultimately eradicate the less desirable physical and psychological traits that deviated from the norm, and reproduction by those with more desirable traits would strengthen the species as a collective.

The ongoing confused societal beliefs between what was and was not heritable reflected the continuing conflation of physical disabilities with traits such as laziness, promiscuity and deviant behavior. Consequently, this had the effect of justifying the incarceration of disabled people as an acceptable and necessary form of social regulation. This justification for treating disability as deviance opened the way for further dehumanization through the practice of viewing the disabled body as legitimate material for scientific study.

Snyder and Mitchell (2006), in their extensive study on the eugenics movement in America, make the argument that medical and scientific research treated disability as ‘both an insoluble mystery and a preoccupation that promises to yield knowledge about non disabled bodies’, thus objectifying disabled bodies as ‘objects of rampant speculation and a wellspring



of medical knowledge of all bodies' (2006:28), consequently creating the belief '*that disability makes a person available for excessive experimentation and bureaucratic oversight.*' (ibid., italics authors' own). They argue that this is a primary source of the continuing oppression of people with disabilities in contemporary American society, where disability continues to be a focus of scientific research that allows a voyeuristic curiosity to be cloaked in empirical investigation (2006:29); a situation that can also be seen to exist throughout the western world.

As the twentieth century progressed, the mass marketing of an idealized 'typical' body image that privileged white, middle class, non disabled physicalities even further undermined the social positioning of anyone with a non-average body. This insidious scaffolding of a cultural norm that was fundamentally exclusionary led even more clearly to a position of discrimination against those that did not conform to the stereotypical 'average'. Thus the medical model firmly placed defect within the individual body, consequently alienating the individual and reinforcing the discrimination and shame connected to disability within the social sphere (Siebers, 2008:72).

As will be shown, there are strong parallels between these cultural discourses of disability and the medical narratives embedded in *Diagnosis of a Faun*, albeit this was apparently an inadvertent effect of those narratives. Their presence suggests an invitation to view disability, as represented in this work both metaphorically and in the physical act of looking, in a way that inherently limits the humanity of the subject.

#### **4.3 The Performance**

This critical analysis is based on a video recording of the performance of the work in the Ellen Stewart Theatre at LaMaMa in the East Village, New York, in December 2009. As previously described, the multiple narratives running through *Diagnosis of a Faun* epitomize the ambiguities contained in the medical model of disability. The work itself is an enactment

of the model that is startling in its accurate portrayal of the themes of otherness, rehabilitation, and containment, yet there was no statement from Rogoff, at any time, of an agenda to create a work that tackled the cultural impact of the medical model of disability. This work never overtly claimed to display political criticism or post-modern irony.

The performance set is divided into two scenes, either the foregrounded medical theatre as site of educative lecture and surgical intervention, or a primeval birch tree forest situated upstage, behind the curtains that act as a backdrop for the medical theatre scene. The forest contains no reference to contemporary life but reflects an environment that is unspoiled by human interference. The parallel to the cultural divide created by the shift from pre-industrial agrarian life to medicalized regulation and control is striking. The title might suggest there is reference to Vaslav Nijinsky's *L'après-midi d'un faune* (1912), but any reference is negligible, being limited to the raised mound at the rear of the stage as an approximation of the original set. The movement vocabulary of Rogoff's faun also makes passing reference to Nijinsky's choreography as it is somewhat reminiscent of the historically acknowledged stylized, angular movements choreographed and danced by Nijinsky in the same role. As in Nijinsky's work, there is also an erotic subtext in Rogoff's choreography and she borrows from Nijinsky's representational use of the nymph's scarf, by replacing it with scattered rose petals for the final symbolic moment of sexual consummation between the faun and the ballerina. The musical score consists of the music of Jean Sibelius set within a sound score by Leon Rothenberg.

There are four performers whose presence on stage offers a strange combination of reality and fantasy. Dancer Lucie Baker plays the part of the young, gifted ballerina facing surgery to repair a ruptured Achilles tendon. This is an injury that could effectively end the ballerina's career and render her valueless in her current milieu, where physical excellence is privileged, requiring an extreme level of conformity to an idealized image of the perfect body,

the sylph. Baker actually dances in a sylph costume in the opening scene, the visual image reinforcing the stereotype. The narrative follows her progress through surgery and rehabilitation, offering some form of transformation as she appears to discover a new form of dance with the faun, a contemporary version of her classical training. This effectively returns her to the world of dance in a slightly altered guise, perhaps one that can be interpreted as ideal transformed to average, demonstrating the acceptability of inhabiting a 'normal' body that has released the desire to achieve the ideal notion of the perfect sylph. This provides a wonderful allegory of the shift from classical philosophical thought based on the ideal, to the dominance of the norm in the modern industrial, scientific age of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

There are two doctor roles, Dr. A and Dr. B. Donald Kollisch, who has never performed professionally before and is in fact a physician in real life, plays Dr. A. His role is a combination of medical lecturer as well as dancer and at one point, together with Baker, he engages in a brief, approximate version of the grand pas de deux from Marius Petipa's ballet *Sleeping Beauty* (1890). This is a surreal sequence that takes place during the surgery scene and the audience reaction of intermittent laughter, as recorded at the December 2009 performance, suggests that viewers are unsure whether this is intended to be parody or a moment of transcendence. Again, it emphasizes the normalizing of the ideal as it utilizes a visual image of pedestrian movement meeting a technique based on a perceived elitist art form.

Kollisch's movements appear tentative and slightly awkward as he partners Baker. He attempts a classical technique that obviously has no bodily foundation or muscle memory of the kind generally only acquired from years of repetitive training. This sequence highlights the tension that arises between stylized movement executed by a trained dancer and a dancer who has not been taught the skills of the particular canon. The inevitable comparisons reinforce the notion that the untrained dancer is deficient in some aspects of his or her performance, a pitfall that disabled dancers often fall into when performing within an existing canon (Cooper

Albright, 2001). Rogoff confines this juxtaposition of trained and untrained dancer within a ballet idiom to Kollisch's performance.

Mozgala's duets are more closely aligned to his natural movement repertoire and tend to emphasize his unique physicality. This contrast between Kollisch's societal standing as knowledgeable expert and his performance as inept dancer actually highlights the acceptability of a non disabled performer retaining a level of credibility that would tend not be extended to a disabled dancer (McGrath, 2004).<sup>xxiii</sup> Kollisch's portrayal of the role of doctor maintains the medical model of disability's links between skill, knowledge, ascendancy and benevolent expertise that controls and contains, strangely emphasized and authenticated by the viewer's knowledge of his real life profession and his obvious lack of dance training.

Dancer Emily Pope Blackman plays the part of Dr. B, who also combines a performance of medical lecture interspersed with dance. Dr. B loses the vestiges of sophistication and civilized behavior through her contact with the faun, and their duet, which will be the focus of this critical analysis, is an enactment of all that is considered transgressive in corporeal difference as represented by the faun's embodiment.

The role of the faun is danced by Mozgala (See Appendix D, Fig. 2) and again the synchronous elements of this performance and the dancer's real life experience create a disturbingly accurate portrayal of a man whose physicality is central to his presence as medical object of scrutiny and research. Interestingly, most of the attention that this work received was focussed on the preparation and rehearsal phase. The prime subject of this attention was not the actual choreographic process, but the transformation of Mozgala's physicality by the interventions of the choreographer. It is this aspect of *Diagnosis of a Faun* that will first be addressed.

#### **4.4 Rehabilitating the faun**

One of the most thought provoking aspects in the development of *Diagnosis of a Faun* was the creation of a fictional narrative centred on rehabilitation and transformation that was paralleled within the working relationship between Mozgala and Rogoff. As they negotiated the evolving physicality of Mozgala as dancer, metaphor and real life became inextricably entwined. Rogoff's methods of extending Mozgala's range and quality of movement were focused on fundamentally changing his physical presence in the world. Where previously he had described his gait as 'like a velociraptor', Rogoff and Mozgala worked through a technique of 'body shaking' that had the effect of undoing habituated muscular responses and so gave him an increased kinaesthetic awareness that informed new movement patterns (Genzlinger, 2009). Mozgala valued this in itself and it will most likely impact very positively on his general physical wellbeing in years to come, as his changed gait results from a changed musculoskeletal alignment and awareness. However, when discussing these physical changes, Mozgala spoke of no longer at times feeling like 'John Merrick on Fleet Street' (ibid). This statement reinforces the belief systems that uphold the medicalization of disability, where the physical changes are interpreted in terms of success in achieving a corporeality that closer matches a perceived norm, rather than an appreciation of how a unique physicality can achieve its own potential.

The media coverage of this aspect of *Diagnosis of a Faun* exposes the inherent assumptions made by journalists when writing about the relationship between dancer and choreographer in the making of the work, giving Rogoff a medicalized authoritative position in relation to Mozgala as research specimen. Genzlinger, when writing in the *New York Times* (2009), astoundingly refers to this relationship in the context of artistic creation, saying 'the more important work of art may be what Ms. Rogoff has done to transform Mr. Mozgala's body.' The incredible elimination of any vestige of agency on Mozgala's part is reflected

throughout this review, which barely mentions the actual creation and performance of the work, but reifies Rogoff's perceived rescue and transformation of a man so that now 'he doesn't feel so enslaved' (ibid) by his cerebral palsy.

The objectification of Mozgala as medical specimen is compounded by reference to a rheumatologist at the Hospital for Special Surgery in Manhattan, whom Genzlinger reported was used as a 'sounding board' by Rogoff during the project. Again, the choreographer is the prime mover in obtaining medical expertise to validate Mozgala's work on his own physicality; his work is not acknowledged independently without Rogoff's guidance and control at any point in the article. Perhaps one of the most telling statements made by Mozgala is 'This isn't a cure, I'm always going to have cerebral palsy' (ibid).

But now, Genzlinger explains, 'when he (Mozgala) is fully concentrating, a passer-by might have to look twice to realize he has a disability at all' (ibid). According to this article, his gait has now been successfully transformed by Rogoff to allow him to appear non-disabled; he can now 'pass' in public and hide his disability from the gaze of others. Sadly, this is something of value in contemporary western society because of the continuing stigma attached to any outward sign of disability and Mozgala must welcome the possibility of walking anonymously along with the corporeal average, as long as no-one looks too intently. The weight of others' critical, exclusionary stares cannot be an easy one to bear and it is an indictment of the continuing influence of the medical model of disability within contemporary culture that Mozgala welcomes this new means of invisibility.

The objectification of Mozgala as medical specimen is not by any means confined to Genzlinger's article. Wendy Perron, writing in *Dance Magazine* (November, 2009), describes Mozgala as 'half man, half invalid' with 'hopelessly turned in legs'. She states 'The loss of control of his lower body appears to be something other than human, yet is also very human', a strangely inaccurate statement as Mozgala has full control of his lower body,

but in an atypical movement style. She then goes on to observe that his performance does however 'indicate(s) a libido that's right on the surface'. The parallels with an earlier understanding of disability grounded in freak show and medical theatre are remarkable, endowing Mozgala with non-human traits that define his presence in a reductive manner, and then linking these with a sexuality that hints at being not quite controlled enough, his libido being so externally evident despite his atypical lower body. This dual expression of lack of bodily control maintains the innate notion that disability is in need of containment in order to protect society from the excesses of a corporeal presence perceived as unpredictable in its lack of civilized restraint.

Disability theorist Tobin Siebers discusses this reduction of self-determination, identifying it as a component of the medicalization of disability. Personal choice and autonomy are forfeited as the disabled body is considered to be firmly within the public sphere, privacy is invaded and complete strangers feel

'empowered to touch them, to comment on their disability, and to offer medical advice or charity. The medical model too often makes of the world a hospital where the disabled are obliged to be perpetual patients and the nondisabled have the right to play doctor.'

2008:147

This appropriation of corporeal agency by an ableist mentality is clearly demonstrated in both Genzlinger's and Perrin's reviews of the work, with both journalists largely disregarding the work itself in favour of giving prominence to the corporeal presence of Mozgala as a disabled man.

Roslyn Sulcas' review, also in the New York Times (December, 2009), appeared a short while after Genzlinger's article. Taking a slightly different stance in her opening paragraphs, Sulcas follows the inspirational path towards the disempowerment of Mozgala as brave, disabled dancer, stating that Mozgala and Rogoff deserve 'both praise and admiration for their collective grit and courage' (ibid). She also feels the need to first highlight the changes

in Mozgala's physical capacities due to the work done in rehearsals, rather than focussing on a critical review of the performance per se, labelling the achievement as an inspiring story. There are some redeeming aspects to this review, as Sulcas does critique the actual performance which she describes as 'an uneasy blend of bad theatre and uninspired dancing' other than Mozgala being cast as the faun, which she considers a masterstroke. She appreciates the movement vocabulary of 'twisting, stretching movements that Mr. Mozgala embodies with creaturely power' but then she invalidates her statement by completing it with the observation that his movements 'never appear to be masking any physical limitations.' This statement has the effect of lauding the fact that a movement vocabulary has been created despite Mozgala's disability, rather than critiquing the quality of his movement within the context of the performance. Again, critical review is driven by the presence of disability, not the presence of the dancer.

Another journalist, Mitch Montgomery writing for the online magazine *Backstage* (December, 2009) also reviewed Rogoff's work by giving prominence to Mozgala's cerebral palsy. He describes how Rogoff created the role of faun in order to 'see how the indomitable performer's physical limitations might withstand - or, indeed, redefine – the arena of dance.' Montgomery (ibid.) continues in this vein, again celebrating the heroic nature of Mozgala's performance. He references Mozgala's 'uneven but focused gait' by stating:

To see the other skillful performers execute these primal, twisting gestures, which seem to be reverberations of the faun's movements, is an affecting way to celebrate Mozgala's overwhelming abilities and commitment.

With each recognition of Mozgala's abilities, Montgomery manages to negate his statements by objectifying and valorizing the dancer, completing his review with the statement that perhaps Rogoff is reminding the viewer that 'the rehabilitator stands to gain as much from the act of healing as the one rehabilitated'. This serves to reinforce the notion of charitable giving where superiority and condescension can lurk under the guise of a caring demeanour,



unfortunately only too frequently experienced by people with disabilities as an experience of humiliation and disempowerment (Wendell, 1996, Linton, 2007, Sullivan, 2005).

#### **4.5 Dancing the faun**

The duet between Mozgala as faun and Pope Blackman as Dr. B acts as a microcosm displaying all the elements discussed so far in relation to the medical model of disability. Dr. B embodies the expert knowledge that objectifies and diminishes a corporeality that is not typical into a pathologized version of being in the world. The faun represents all that is perceived as transgressive in corporeal difference. The scene opens with a white coated Dr. B standing at a lectern to one side of the stage introducing the topic of her lecture, surgical interventions of the foot and ankle, and she then proceeds to introduce her most recent research subject, a five thousand year old pagan faun. The faun appears upstage centre, wearing only a surgical gown, and begins to walk slowly forwards removing the gown as he does so, revealing his naked body apart from a loincloth. As he walks, Dr. B continues to talk, describing his physical condition in meticulous anatomical detail. Her description repeats the continuing theme of the intertwining of fantasy with reality that is present in *Diagnosis of a Faun*, as her words describe with great accuracy Mozgala's real life spasticity and how it affects his musculoskeletal functioning. The faun turns, and resumes his walk upstage away from the audience while slowly raising his arms, so that now a full view of his movement can be observed from behind. This walking pattern is a very precise re-enactment of medical inspection that anyone with a disability would have experienced when receiving any type of medical intervention. Disability is often performed as demonstration in order to provide teaching material for medical personnel. This practice had its roots in the seventeenth century medical theatre where anatomy was studied through the dissection of cadavers in front of an assembled audience. Modern day medical practices continue to use the diagnostic gaze in a

way that reduces human interaction to objectifying scrutiny, as patients are required to display their disabilities, usually in a state of undress, often with little regard for their personal dignity and integrity as participant in the process (Sullivan, 2005).

Dr. B continues her diagnostic monologue, maintaining the medical gaze that objectifies the faun as he slowly poses and gestures with twisting, angular movements. He caresses himself as Dr. B speaks of his hirsute body and then he disrupts her description of the planned surgery on his Achilles tendons by suddenly running forward and back, with Dr. B mirroring this unexpected burst of action. The faun roars, interrupting the flow of words, and disappears under the curtain that divides the forest from the medical theatre.

Dr. B follows the faun, removing her white coat as she does so, revealing a formal business suit. She draws back the curtain to expose the forest scene. Dr. B then dances with tortuous writhing movements, echoing the movement style of the faun as she slowly removes her jacket to uncover the flimsy camisole she is wearing beneath, the discarding of her clothes signifying a stripping away of the hegemonic emblems of her profession. Her dance becomes wilder and her movements represent a loss of all vestiges of control, her shoes are flung away and she pulls her skirt up over her hips before lying face down on the floor, with legs splayed widely. The faun appears and begins to dance with Dr. B. At this point, their roles are reversed as the faun now manipulates Dr. B's body, examining her with a detached, primordial curiosity and raising her skirt to smell her crotch in an animalistic manner. Her initial resistance defines the duet at this juncture, highlighting the divide between her previous detached medical gaze and this intense, overpowering sexual gaze, equally as disempowering but with Dr. B now being the subject of transgressive attention. Dr. B slowly succumbs to the sensuality of the encounter, upholding the embedded cultural fantasy of male sexual dominance and female submission combined with the perceived sexual depravity of the 'other'.

There is an undertone of aggression and threat at times, associated with an increasing passivity on the part of Dr. B. There are overlapping messages relating to lack of autonomy, the objectifying gaze, a transgressive sensuality grounded in disregard for the humanity of the other, and the peeling away of societal restraints to lay bare raw, instinctual drives, all providing an enactment of the different issues discussed earlier relating to the conflation of physical difference with monstrosity and deviance. The faun has transformed from medical specimen into a representation of the grotesque body, a body in opposition to the norm which resides at the margins of conscious awareness of the unknown and calls into question the systems of classification that provide the security of predictability. This is the body that is open and inclusive of all possibilities.

The duet continues with intermingled moments of aggression, curiosity, tenderness, intimacy, detachment and disdain and then comes to an end as the faun walks away, having no further interest in Dr. B who remains lying in a foetal position as she is paged over a loudspeaker system. Dr. B hurriedly retrieves her clothing, closes over the curtain to conceal the faun's habitat and returns to the lectern to complete her lecture by reporting the faun's disappearance, her persona regaining its authoritative presence as medical expert.

When Mozgala and Pope Blackman dance together, they utilize the floor to great effect as they transfer weight between each other with a fluidity that carries their movement easily from one phrase to the next. Mozgala demonstrates a strength and liveness in his extensive movement vocabulary that complements his powerful stage presence, and Rogoff's choreography takes full advantage of his distinctive movement repertoire. His crouching, twisting poses and angular lower body movements are combined with a sinuous upper body and expressive use of hands that give his performance a complex layering of different movement patterns that blend together to provide a dance performance that is compelling to watch.

Mozgala is a very accomplished dancer with a forceful stage presence but unfortunately, this is hugely under-reported in all the articles and reviews that it was possible to source. His role as medical specimen is very clearly delineated as each reviewer interprets his work as a medical project undertaken by Rogoff. This has been very overtly stated in the description of Rogoff's ensuing project, the making of a film that will document the journey of herself and Mozgala in the creation of *Diagnosis of a Faun* and beyond. A description of the project is available on *Kickstarter*, a web based funding platform for creative ventures. It is unclear whether Rogoff actually wrote the description, but it can be presumed that she approved of the content before it was posted on the website. The tone of the writing is sensationalist:

She (Rogoff) didn't realize that after a childhood of leg braces, operations and physical therapy, Gregg lived under the fear of a dire prognosis: he would be in a wheelchair by age forty. Gregg never realized he had options.

*Kickstarter*, April 2012

The complete negation of Mozgala's agency in terms of his ability to imagine his own future is compounded by the subsequent language used to describe their ongoing work, phrases such as 'confusion with proprioception and proximity and identity issues', 'going into uncharted territory', 'the possibilities for transformation, mind and body, always remained limitless'.

It must be acknowledged that Rogoff and Mozgala together found a way of exploring Mozgala's physicality that was of huge benefit to both his dance performance and his being in the world in terms of corporeal effort and ease of movement. The training technique that emerged is fascinating in its use of dance practice as a means of altering habituated movement patterns that can be restrictive in everyday motion. The writing goes on to state that many parents of children with cerebral palsy have contacted Rogoff to encourage her to make the film. This resonates with the perception of disability as something that can be transformed and normalized through a quasi-medical intervention.

It is understandable that parents of children with cerebral palsy would find this approach to be an attractive alternative to a more rigid physiotherapy exercise regimen, when

it is heralded as potentially being a more effective method of improving a child's physical capacities. The danger is of course that improvement will be understood in terms of achieving a more 'normal' way of being in the world with the possibility of passing as non disabled, rather than achieving a physical presence that maximizes the child's potential within his or her own physicality. Both interventions can descend into the same cultural non acceptance of differing physicalities. The name of the project reflects this stance, as the film is to be entitled *Prognosis of a Faun*. The use of medical terminology both in the dance work and the film replicates the restricted perception of what actually transpired in this collaboration. However, despite the almost evangelical tone of the funding website, the making of the film will have value in recording this fascinating collaboration between dancer and choreographer.

The inability to separate the process of adapting Mozgala's movement patterns from any critical analysis of his proficiency as a dancer has done both Mozgala and Rogoff a disservice. To conflate Mozgala's dance performance with his negotiation of his own disability in terms of physical adaptation has only brought about a reinforcing of the medical model approach with all its attendant deficits. As already explored, the performance itself is rife with images that generate cultural references to disability as abnormal and in need of regulation. The act of viewing this work will now be discussed in order to consider how the medical model of disability informs the way in which disability may be seen in dance performance.

#### **4.6 Theorizing relationship: The medicalization of looking**

In this work, the placement of the faun in the context of a medical setting creates a visual representation that reinforces the societal perception of disability as illness. As the faun's body is examined and meticulously described through the use of functional terminology in the medical theatre scene, the viewer is tacitly invited to collude in the objectification of his body as other (Kuppers, 2003). This mode of looking has been theorized in many different ways, but

what will have relevance to this study of the viewer's gaze is Michel Foucault's notion of a pathologized subjectivity and Martin Buber's differentiation between *I/It* and *I/Thou* as an expression of interpersonal relationship.

In theorizing the medicalization of the disabled body, Foucault's analysis of the creation of docile bodies is extremely useful in providing a framework in order to understand the process by which this occurred. Foucault's understanding of health and medical intervention centred on power and domination of bodies, as Snyder and Mitchell state 'health became less a description of a state of being and more a category of social exclusion, a barometer of deviance, and an imposition of ideas about contamination upon different bodies.' (2006:177).

Although Foucault never offered an explicit analysis of disability, his works on the pathologization of difference in order to create systems of compliance (1991) can be directly applied to the institutionalization of people with disabilities. The eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries aimed to rehabilitate deviance and enforce normality. Where previously power and control focused on the individual's compliance with societal regulatory systems, a fundamental change came about during the nineteenth century where it was no longer the 'individual-as-body' that was the site of control, but a new technology of power that focused on a 'multiple body', the 'population' (1991:245). By the application of this bio-power, docile bodies were created through the establishment of disciplinary systems such as educational, industrial, medical and psychiatric institutions. These formed what Foucault labelled as the 'carceral archipelago' (1991:301) that would serve to normalize the general population. The shift had taken place from individual deviance that could be eradicated through punitive incarceration, to a deviance from the norm that required an incarceration based on rehabilitation. Consequently, the punitive and the abnormal became linked (1991:300). Foucault stated:

...the supervision of normality was firmly encased in a medicine or a psychiatry that provided with a sort of “scientificity”; it was supported by a judicial apparatus which, directly or indirectly, gave it legal justification.

1991:296

The creation of the ugly laws could be understood as a legal enactment of this carceral system of supervision and restraint, protecting the population from the deviant body that did not conform, and so removing agency from these bodies. Those with differing corporealities became the subject of disciplinary measures that fragmented their being, with their bodies becoming an accumulation of parts that required ‘intense diagnosis, classification, documentation, monitoring and discipline in order to render them knowable and productive, to increase the body’s utility’ (Sullivan, 2005). This brought about Foucault’s notion of the ‘clinical gaze’, the invasive, objectifying scrutiny aimed at uncovering pathology, performed by a clinical elite (1991). Physical rehabilitation became the means by which this could come about. This fragmentation of bodies was necessary in order to maintain the norm through nullifying any alternate way of being, especially in the extreme where rehabilitation was not an option because of a physicality that was considered beyond redemption. Incarceration effectively removed these bodies from the social sphere.

In contemporary life, sociologist Martin Sullivan speaks of his own experience as a newly paralyzed man where he underwent a loss not only of physical functions and sensation, but also a loss of possession of his body in terms of knowledge and control. He describes how standard procedures and textbook approaches to the homogenous group ‘patients with paraplegia’ denied any sense of individuality or agency (2005:30). He experienced his paraplegic body as rendered docile through the ‘inculcation of techniques of bodily maintenance’, subjecting parts of his body to ‘precise and calculated training’ (2005:36). This has resonance with the media interpretation of Rogoff’s interventions that brought about physical changes in Mozgala’s body.

In this way, the disabled body becomes defined in terms of lack, what disability activist Bill Hughes calls an ‘invalidation of a medically fabricated norm’ (2005:82). Hughes develops this perspective of disability by arguing that for every preference for a societal norm, there is an accompanying, often implicit, aversion towards the opposite. This aversion is not confined to indifference, but requires that the subject be repulsed and detested. This reflects the state of abjection already discussed in the previous chapter in relation to the disabled body as freak. Through upholding a position of normality as the yardstick against which all human existence should be measured, the medical model of disability of necessity creates a negative expression of corporeality, one that excludes and dehumanizes.

Foucauldian theory provides a very useful tool in recognizing the culturally prescribed knowledge held by the viewer when attending a performance of *Diagnosis of a Faun*. The actual narrative of the work brings these influences alive both in the portrayal of the faun as exotic other, and in the transformative experience of the ballerina. Following surgery to repair her injury, she is rehabilitated in order to return to a norm that suggests she is closer to the notion of average rather than continuing as a product of a more elitist way of being, the sylph-like ballerina. Meanwhile, the faun disappears without his transformative surgery or any rehabilitative process, a body that is beyond redemption.

Up until this point, Foucault’s theories provide a solid basis for considering how disability is viewed in performance when placed in the context of the medical model of disability. However, there is no provision for any interpersonal growth as his construction of power is based upon domination and non-corporeal compliance, in a way that does not consider the possibilities that can arise from embodied engagement at an interpersonal level (Hughes, 2005).



Philosopher Martin Buber's approach to interpersonal relationships offers a means of taking a step beyond the limitations of Foucault's thought in this sphere, by introducing an intersubjectivity that is based in embodied presence.

Buber's seminal work *I and Thou* (1958) may be considered by some to be overly poetic and somewhat lacking in academic rigour (1958:2), but he developed a notion of dialogue that is striking in its parallels to current neuroscientific explanations of interpersonal communication. There is a strong sense that Buber was attempting to articulate ideas of intersubjectivity that were somewhat ephemeral, but the fascinating aspect of his work is that current scientific knowledge regarding interpersonal relationships actually provides concrete substance to his thoughts if this were to be considered necessary. His exploration is based on recognizing two distinct ways of being within a relationship, the *I/It* and the *I/Thou*.

The *I/It* is a relationship of subject to object, where each individual in the dialogue is perceived as consisting of specific, isolated qualities rather than an integrated being, creating a state of separation and detachment. This is very much in keeping with the objectification of the other in the medical model of disability. Buber speaks of man dividing his world into two provinces, one of institutions and one of *I*. He describes institutions as only knowing the *It*, the 'specimen', not able to access the mutual life of intersubjectivity (1958:40). This is the relationship that can be mediated by ideas that objectify, as in societally acquired perceptions of disability. The *I* within the *I/Thou* relationship, however, is contained in a subject to subject connection that recognizes the integrity of both participants in their choosing to relate with their whole being. There is no mediating system of ideas in this way of relating; it has an immediacy that recognizes the humanity of the other. This is a relationship that becomes greater than the sum of its parts, where the intersubjective space allows for the possibility of becoming, rather than merely being (McGilchrist, 2009).

In *Diagnosis of a Faun* however, the medical narrative becomes a mediating system of ideas that can interfere with the creation of an *I/Thou* relationship between disabled dancer and viewer, creating a possibility of either alienation or pity on the viewer's part.

Garland Thomson states:

Pity is an emotional cul-de-sac that ultimately distances starrer and alienates staree. A block to mutuality, pity is repugnance refined into genteel condescension. Empathy, in contrast, bonds in a mutual recognition of shared humanity.'

2009:93

The medical model of disability inherently supports this potential reaction of refined repugnance and can interfere with the possibility of empathic attunement. Its presence in the narrative of *Diagnosis of a Faun* can be clearly seen, and its insidious influence persists in the media responses to the creation and performance of the work. As a result, the effectiveness of this dance work as a performance that incorporates inclusion of differing physicalities is compromised.

In the next chapter, the possibility will be explored of a dance performance that supports empathic attunement, without a subtext of discrimination and exclusion.

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<sup>xx</sup> Schambelan. *Romeo and Juliet* Theatre Breaking Through Barriers. New York: Kirk Theatre March 5 2008

<sup>xxi</sup> Francis Galton (1822-1911), the Victorian polymath, was the first person to apply statistical analysis to the measurement of human characteristics, particularly human intelligence, in order to define the ‘average man’ (a concept first developed by Adolphe Quetelet, a Belgian statistician in 1842). He was an advocate of eugenics.

<sup>xxii</sup> The emphasis on self improvement through voluntary adult education came to the fore from the mid nineteenth century onwards. In both America and Europe there was a proliferation of literary societies, mutual improvement societies, mechanic’s institutes and the forerunners of community colleges that aimed to make education accessible to the average working man. It was believed that knowledge that had a utilitarian and scientific basis would enhance the individual’s productiveness within the work force as well as within society. See Joseph F. Kett, (1994) *The Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties: From Self Improvement to Adult Education in America 1750-1990* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

<sup>xxiii</sup> The different value systems that can arise depending upon the physicality of the dancer have been explored in depth in previous M.A. research. See Eimir McGrath (2004) *Redefining the Boundaries: Integrated Dance and Cultural Changes* Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Limerick.



## Chapter Five

### ***Water burns sun: corporeal diversity and embodied practice***

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The two works that have been previously examined, *Gimp* and *Diagnosis of a Faun*, are both representative of phases of development that arose out of the original understanding of integrated dance as being an exercise in therapeutic inclusion. Both works included dancers with no formal training, a criticism levelled at earlier performances by integrated companies as they tried to move beyond the therapeutic label (Smith, August, 2005, Personal communication)<sup>xxiv</sup>. Despite this, these works have successfully negotiated the boundary between amateur and professional status, performing in mainstream theatres and receiving reviews in mainstream publications, as outlined earlier. The perceived element of therapeutic inclusion is no longer an issue in works such as these. However, as discussed both are still placed within existing frameworks of performance that primarily focus on the atypical physicalities of the dancers. These two phases of development are based on the interpretation of dance performance as either confrontational, aiming at the deconstruction of the notion of monstrous freak, or as inspirational, where a medicalized view is upheld of heroic transcendence in the face of physical adversity. *Water burns sun* (Kuppers, 2010) reveals a more evolved approach to dance performance, successfully moving away from the frameworks that reinforce disability as synonymous with corporeal difference and exclusion. As this is a work created for film rather than for live performance, it raises the question as to whether a valid argument can be created by making comparisons between the three works. Several factors need to be considered in answering this question.

Firstly, there are very few opportunities to view professional dance performances that include dancers with disabilities. Only a handful of professional integrated dance companies exist, and very few other dance companies perform choreographies that include dancers with disabilities. Companies such as *Axis* and *Candoco* rarely tour their work internationally and although there is a steady development of repertoire, live performances are generally limited. For example, *Axis*' website shows that their performance calendar for 2013 is mainly confined to the company's immediate geographical area of California, and a small number of university performance spaces or festivals within the USA. Dance on film extends access to such performances and makes it possible to view works that would otherwise be unavailable.

Secondly, it may be considered that film offers an alternative way of viewing dance, which could be problematic due to the fact that the immediacy of live performance is lost. The relationship that is created between the viewer and the performer comes into question because of the distancing generated by the total lack of any physical proximity. Dance scholar Sarah Whatley discusses this question which has been theorized in terms of bodily engagement,<sup>xxv</sup> stating that (*italics author's own*):

Rather than the spectator being taken *into* the film or the film taking *over* the viewer, the spectator 'meets' the film in a complex space that allows for a shared somatic, kinaesthetic, intercorporeal, intersubjective and visceral involvement, which invites the viewer to identify with the dancing human subject/s.

2010:43

This construction of viewing screendance is an extremely useful one when considering it as a shared experience between dancer and viewer, based in relationship. The emphasis in this thesis is on the neurobiological processes that underpin the relationship created through the gaze, consequently both live and recorded performances can provide the stimulus that awakens the viewer's neurobiological responses. Recent research in the field of neuroaesthetics and film

has given rise to a theory of embodied simulation (Gallese and Guerra) which supports the notion that viewing film is as effective as viewing live performance in respect of attunement and relationship. When watching film:

our bodily involvement [is] to be considered at the implicit and pre-reflective level of intercorporeality ... making clear that the intersubjectivities movies enhance relies on internal non-linguistic representations'

2012:191

These representations are created by the interactions between the brain-body system of each individual and the outside world that occur at a pre-verbal level. The relationships that arise inform each individual in 'how the world shows up' (Noë, 2009) for him or her, a notion that will be discussed further on in this chapter. Due to this, when considering the validity of comparing *water burns sun* with the other two performances already critiqued, screendance in the context of this thesis provides a valid alternative to live performance.

The final variable that needs to be considered is the sociological aspect of the representation of disability in film, and the consequent perceptions of disability that have historically been created and reinforced when engaged with this genre. This has been examined by many writers in the field of disability theory, such as Snyder and Mitchell (2000, 2010), Davis (1997, 2005), Albright, (1997) and Whatley (2010). Most filmic representations of disability have been contained within narratives that reinforce existing perceptions, through using disability as metaphor in order to uphold a normative view of the body. As Mitchell and Snyder (2010) have pointed out, mainstream film making reinforces what they have labeled 'national normativities'<sup>xxvi</sup> where the role of the disabled character was usually to either provide the necessary counterpoint to the protagonist's triumph of good over evil, or to be the embodied presence of loss and despair within the film narrative:

The materiality of metaphor via disabled bodies gives all bodies a tangible essence in that the 'healthy' corporeal surface fails to achieve its symbolic effect without its disabled counterpart.

Mitchell and Snyder, 2000:64

The disabled body as abject provides the necessary binary in order to maintain the boundaries of physical, cognitive, sensory, and aesthetic foundations of embodiment demonstrated within national normativities (ibid.). Another popular narrative previously discussed is that of the heroic but damaged protagonist surmounting his or her disability through the intervention of a good hearted, non disabled, altruistic rescuer. The online advertising of Rogoff's planned film *Prognosis of a Faun* (2011) falls into this category, with a promotional video that valorizes the process of change that Mozgala has experienced. The opening film shot of Mozgala's silhouette walking down a snowy city street quickly shifts to give prominence to the actions of his legs and feet as he walks, the camera now filming from behind. His gait is atypical and along with the anonymizing use of silhouette followed by a camera angle that does not allow his face to be seen, an unfortunate, and most likely unintentional, parallel is drawn between his movements and the medicalizing stare that transforms subject into specimen. The musical phrase that accompanies this very short sequence is a haunting, gentle sound that could be interpreted as aiming to evoke pity or wonder. In the space of a few seconds, the filmmaker's choices have created a visual connection to the stereotypical beliefs most often contained in inspirational films regarding overcoming physical adversity. There is no doubt that Mozgala has experienced an enormously positive effect on his posture and gait through the work he has done with Rogoff, and his sincerity when speaking of the experience is clearly discernible. However, the language employed to impart this information reinforces the perception of a man who has overcome the great adversity of disability, and in doing so reifies the choreographer who worked with him to bring about those changes. When she tells him 'You never have to walk like that again', he states 'Her voice sounds like the Almighty's, like Yahweh on the mountain.'<sup>xxvii</sup> Mozgala's agency is invalidated. Whatley (2010:44) discusses this type of discourse that can be found in some film recordings of integrated companies available online, where the use of emotive



language seems intent on eliciting a sympathetic response, providing spectatorial pleasure that objectifies the dancer through reducing his or her presence to heroic victim. Judith Smith of *Axis* also reported the difficulties inherent in trying to gain critical feedback from audience members following performances. Questionnaires were distributed regularly in the early days of the company, but eventually the practice was abandoned as practically all the feedback received reflected this condescending admiration for bravery in the face of great adversity. Smith interpreted this as due to the lack of artistic rigour in the performances at the time, consequently reinforcing the ableist view of disabled dancers as objects of pity (personal communication, August 2005). It reinforces the notion that audience expectations are to some extent shaped by the intention and execution of the choreography.

The fact that disabled roles are often played by non disabled actors raises yet another issue within the mainstream film genre, where the representation of disability comes within the realm of fantasy, a role to be played rather than an acknowledgement of a valid presence in the world (Lewis, 2000:94). The ‘acting’ of disability becomes the normative, inherently making the statement that such representation should remain within the exclusionary sphere of the non disabled. In mainstream film production, this manipulation of disability as metaphor to uphold normative binaries is ingrained to such an extent that it infiltrates all levels of filmic representation (Darke 1998, Longmore 1997).

From a dance perspective, filmed performance can provide a means of redressing this exclusionary view of differently abled bodies. Whatley speaks of the sense of agency achieved by disabled performers who retain control of the film process, referencing dancer Catherine Long who through the use of speech along with dance ‘finds ways to control the viewer’s gaze in order to speak beyond the visual text of her disability’ (2010:44), an experience of empowerment that Whatley states ‘not only draws deliberate attention to the politics of disability but also explicitly foregrounds a cultural perspective informed by and

within the phenomenology of bodily difference.’ (2010:45). Both performances considered so far have included the use of voice, but it could be argued that in both cases the use of voice reinforced a particular political view of bodily difference, without offering an embodied presence that contextualized this in a transformative way. The embodied presence of the dancer became subsumed within the strength of the message, as either freak or medicalized object. Interestingly, *water burns sun* is the only work that does not incorporate the use of voice. Kuppers (2009) makes the point that this is not a choice that aims to privilege the non-verbal over the verbal, as non-verbal gestures and communications can just as easily become familiar markers of culturally encoded intent. The conventions of familiar movements can convey predictable perceptions of disability just as easily as the spoken word. This is a notion that will be considered in greater depth in relation to human neurobiological systems of interaction in the next chapter. The creation of screendance that privileges that dancer’s embodied presence rather than reinforcing negative stereotypes of disability offers an alternative viewing lens. This alternative lens has become increasingly present in film works in disability culture.

## **5.2 Embodied presence and Screendance**

In recent years, there has been the emergence of independent (i.e. without mainstream commercial backing) disability film festivals where low budget projects are screened, showcasing works ‘ about the struggles, triumphs, exclusions, successes and everyday living experiences of disabled people.’ (Mitchell and Snyder, 2010). These film festivals offer an alternative view of disability, where embodiments can be explored without being seen through an ableist lens. Kuppers’ work *water burns sun* is one such work, part of a larger project entitled *Burning* (Berkeley, California, and other sites, 2008-10)<sup>xxviii</sup>. This project was created by the Olympias, an artists’ collective of which Kuppers is the Artistic Director. Olympias focuses on disability culture work and performance research, and *Burning* explored

‘movement as a tracker of difference, but not to work with ideas of deficit or negativity, struggle or fight’, but rather to ‘host the multiplicity of movements we hold inside’ (Kuppers, 2009)<sup>xxix</sup>. In *Burning*, collaborating artists wanted to explore a shared interest in transformation, the cultural images of disease, disability and addiction, the effects of invasion and touch in people’s lives, and how embodied poetry can enhance life (Kuppers, 2009). As a performer and choreographer who identifies as disabled, Kuppers has utilized dance as a means of exploring her own physicality as well as the stereotypical perceptions of disability as abject.

In delving into this fusion of lived experience and received perceptions, Kuppers has turned to *butoh* in order to give creative expression to her explorations within the work *water burns sun*. She references *butoh*:

not so much as a specific technique allegiance or cultural embedment, but in relation to a mode of thinking about bodies and intensities: about cultivating the poetics of bodily meaning.

2010:82

The inherent limitations contained within western codified movement practice have already been explored in previous chapters; there tends to be an expectation of meeting a norm in terms of physicality and movement vocabulary, which is by its nature exclusionary. *Butoh* as a genre, however, offers a very different approach to dance performance that is inclusive of different physicalities. The word *butoh* means ‘ancient dance’ or ‘dance step’ and is used to describe a form of dance that almost defies any prescriptive definition. It is not easily encapsulated into a neat explanation as it is based in experience and empathy, it is not stylized or symbolic, it depends on what is felt. It

... rides the moment of experience in transition, its morphology has transformational potential, pointing in the direction of change and how you change – that is, in your never quite solid world.

Fraleigh 2010:35

Butoh focuses on ‘the body that becomes’, with the emphasis on the transitional phase, known as *ma*, that exists between each moment of movement, each moment of intention and each moment of experience within the dance. This inherent transience contained in butoh performance fits well with the exploration of dance movement that is not circumscribed by body type or codified movement (ibid.). Like contact improvisation, butoh focuses on the body in the process of dancing rather than the virtuosity of prescribed movement within a specific technique. In terms of this thesis, the transitional is a core notion that links many diverse elements. Firstly, there is the exploration of transitional space within theatre performance. Secondly, there is the development of the notion of transitional space that exists in interpersonal relationship - this is the point of connection when relationship transforms into Buber’s I/Thou rather than the disconnected I/You or I/It. Now, the *ma* of butoh provides a transition within movement that speaks of the impermanence of existence and dancer as metamorphosing ‘shape-shifter’ (Fraleigh, 2010:11). The boundaries between ability and disability become immaterial. When considering dance as representing a broad spectrum of physicalities, butoh provides a means of blurring the non disabled/disabled distinctions that exist in other genres and as such, it offers a very apt vehicle for Kuppers’ explorations in *water burns sun*.

Butoh emerged in Japan and has its roots in the interweaving of western and eastern influences that can be traced back to the late nineteenth century, when Japan opened up to foreign trade and consequently foreign influence in all aspects of culture. When Japanese dancers began to visit the west in the early twentieth century, they were influenced by German expressionist dance and this genre was brought back to Japan. Consequently, expressionism blended with Japanese traditional *noh* and *kabuki* influences, to form the basis of what was to become butoh. One major proponent of this dance genre, Hijikata Tatsumi, wanted no formal notation to be applied to his dance practice, his notation style was surreal and poetic, providing some direction regarding specific movement, but also reflecting the influences that had given

impulse to the movement in the first place. For example, his *butoh fu* (dance notation collages) would include items such as photos and lines of poetry. This reflected the metamorphic nature of butoh, not fixed in any one gesture or movement, but expressed in a myriad different ways (Fraleigh, 2010). Kuppers' approach to the recording and reviewing of her dance explorations utilizes a similarly eclectic style. The move away from a formal style of notation opens up the possibility of considering dance in a new light, without the constraints imposed by a more prescriptive approach. Choreography as text is no longer dominant. With the emphasis on the embodiment and lived experience of the dancer rather than the execution of a set choreography, performance becomes greater than text. This allows for the possibility of seeing the dancing body in ways other than those enclosed within existing perceptions. Moving beyond the body as cultural text brings the viewer to a place where boundaries are no longer clear.

As with all dance that attempts to blur boundaries and stretch the imagination of the participants (whether dancer or viewer), butoh reflects the larger issues that surround difference and disability. Existing notions can be set aside and the full expression of the human condition can be explored in all of its intentions and embodiments.

### **5.3 water burns sun: the performance**

(See Appendix D, Fig. 3). In creating *water burns sun* as part of the *burning* project, Kuppers stated in the programme notes that her research aim was to 'explore the limits of somatic experience and cultural expression, to make artful life experiential and hence to create new tools for living in the chemically saturated world we all inhabit'. (2009a). The choreography of *water burns sun* is grounded in butoh, as Kuppers recognizes a connection which she describes as the intertwining of disability and dance. In commenting on the collaboration between herself and Neil Marcus, she says:

In different ways, our bodies read as abnormal on conventional dance stages. Butoh attracted both of us for this delicious movement, this play between the depth and

surface, the place of metamorphosis and transformation...The cripple of Butoh rehearses abjection, a loss of control as essence that I wish to reclaim as a disability culture artist who chafes against negative stereotype

2010:90

The film begins with an opening shot of Marcus, zooming in from above to a close up of his highlighted head and naked upper torso, and as the camera pulls back, the scene cuts to quoted text from butoh artist Hijikata:

When I begin to wish I were crippled--even though I am perfectly healthy—or rather that I would have been better off born a cripple that is the first step towards butoh.

1988<sup>xxx</sup>

A montage of enigmatic images follow as Marcus, who has a spastic movement vocabulary, proceeds to dislocate the viewer's preconceptions of dance movement. Dance academic Sondra Fraleigh comments on the physicality of the butoh dancer:

In various states of beauty and decay, the body of butoh, like the body of nature, always moves slightly beyond comprehension. It is certainly not the perfect body of ballet, the expressive body of modern dance or the cool body of post modern dance.

2010:54

These opening shots immediately create a tension between bound movement and flow. Marcus' movements are angular as he suddenly rises from sitting back on his heels to a kneeling position. One hand is clenched in a fist, the other flexed inwardly at the wrist, fingers stretched as if in spasm. His arms extend as a shadowy female figure emerges from the background and makes contact with him, gently brushing his extended arm before swiftly exiting. A second female dancer caresses his face before melting into the shadows. A third female dancer propels herself along the floor by her forearms and hands, mirroring Marcus' hand positions but with a fluidity that softens the movement as Marcus turns in her direction, slowly focusing on her presence, the muscular tension in his body reducing as he does so. In each of these very brief encounters, there is a congruence between Marcus and the other three dancers that is created

in the meeting of the gaze, the giving and receiving of touch and the echoing of gestures in bodies that each hold a very different muscularity. Within a very short space of time, the scene is set for the development of the relationship between viewer and dancer that reflects this intimacy between the dancers themselves.

Two specific sections of this short dance film will be the focus of this chapter. The first, depicting the simple act of drinking a glass of water, brings Marcus' physical presence to a level of awareness in the viewer that cannot so easily be achieved in any other way. Watching a person with a disability negotiate everyday tasks, such as the lifting and drinking of a glass of water can be excruciating, when perceived as an incomplete and flawed movement pattern within a damaged, non normate body. When looked at as a dance however, the movement no longer has to contain the perceptions of disability that otherwise might dominate if considered from such an ableist viewpoint. Butoh delves into the essence of the movement as it is performed by a body that contains the accumulated elements of disability, but is not merely a reference point for that disability. Drinking water becomes a study in the power of movement to bring about an awareness of the humanity of the dancer and his embodied presence within the dance.

The other section, a very short duet between Marcus and one of the female dancers, Mayuko Ayabe, extends this communication between viewer and performer. The sensuality of the dance shows Marcus in a different light, initiating an intimacy with the female dancer that is rarely expected of a man with a disability, thus confronting the viewer with what is often considered a taboo subject that cannot be countenanced, the co-existence of sexuality and disability (Kuppers, 2001; Sandhal and Auslander, 2005; Davis, 2005).

In the first section, dancer Neil Marcus lifts and drinks a glass of water. The use of this pedestrian act, within a butoh idiom, provides Marcus with the possibility of communicating agency and empowerment through movement. This is not the pathologized

movement pattern signifying dysfunction in a normalized world; this is an authentic exploration of a valid way of being in the world, using artistic expression as the vehicle. The opening image of the glass of water on the floor foregrounds the heads and upper bodies of Marcus and a female dancer (Eboni Hawkins), moving towards each other in a prone position. As they meet, their gaze directed at each other, there is a brief moment of intimacy with foreheads touching before Marcus' gaze is redirected towards the glass. The image of his head splits in two and metamorphoses into a strange fusion of eyes, noses and cheeks as the camera sees him through the distorting lens of the glass of water. This fleeting moment of metamorphosis holds multiple readings within it. It awakens the mindset of disability as grotesque and outside the realm of ordinary life, in the Bakhtinian sense of 'presenting the body in its non idealized form' (Davis, 2005:177). The gaze of the dancer cannot be met as the face fractures into a collection of parts that no longer form a comprehensible whole. The known becomes unknown. Kupperts states 'In butoh a state of exception becomes the threshold for a new expressive force, and it is at this threshold that the cripple .... hold(s) a tenuous agent-less position.' (2010:93 )<sup>xxxi</sup>. A moment of transition is occurring. The camera abruptly cuts to the image of Marcus in a kneeling position on the floor with a wheelchair barely visible in the shadowy background, the glass of water on the floor immediately in front of him. His highlighted torso is still naked, as he transfers his weight forward through his extended right arm and clenched hand. He sits back on his heels, his body appearing slightly contorted as his left arm maintains an outwardly rotated position, his head leaning to one side. His hand reaches for the glass, pushing it away in his effort to control the movement of his hand and arm. His body reacts by folding in on itself, muscles contracting. In slow, deliberate movements, he uses his body's tension to steady one arm as the other hand grasps the glass, muscular tremors apparent in the movement of his hand. He raises the glass to his lips, again utilizing his body's



involuntary contractions to maintain control of his movement. The glass is lowered to the floor, some water spilling out as the glass is released by his fingers.

The muscular tension that is contained within this sequence can evoke two very different responses. It can trigger a pity reaction if the movement is translated in terms of loss and inadequacy. What is expected to be a simple co-ordinated act becomes a striving for something unattainable, as the muscles of Marcus' body prevent him from carrying out this movement in the prescribed, non-disabled way. However, if the movement is viewed as the legitimate act of a body that responds in an alternative but valid way, it is transformed into something very different. The viewer can enter the world of another physicality, appreciating the beauty of the movement that affirms disability identity in itself, not as representative of loss or inadequacy. The movement is rich in the reality of Marcus' spastic vocabulary, where the effort to control and co-ordinate is very clearly seen by the viewer at a visual level, and the corresponding firing of the mirror neuron system awakens an intellectual response that can vary from open curiosity to empathic attunement (Gallese, 2012). The marginalization of disability, which denies full agency in all aspects of living, is confronted and disrupted.

In the second film clip, normalcy and marginalization are again deconstructed, but this time in a manner that challenges the deeply entrenched prejudices that surround agency and sexuality where disability is present. There is a long history of denying the rights of people with disabilities, especially where sexual agency is concerned. Kuppers states:

The tendency to metaphorise, to make disabled people or people in pain represent purity, pre rational life and exceptional moments removed from a social sphere, is deeply troubling to those of us who live these lives as ordinary experiences, manageable and familiar (if not welcomed).

2010:91

The sexuality of the disabled body is denied, it is seen instead as an embodiment trapped in a cultural perception of child like innocence and stoic cheerfulness. Disability psychotherapist Valerie Sinason discusses this phenomenon at length, naming this cultural expectation as a

‘secondary handicap’ (2010). This reflects the expectation that people with disabilities should be forever showing positive affect to the world, grateful and happy, with a permanent smile to negate the possibility of discontent or existential pain. ‘They are seen as wondrous permanent children who inhabit a never never land where sexuality will never intrude (2010:23).

Confronting this perception of disability, Marcus invites us to activate what Garland Thomson has labeled the ‘baroque stare’ (2009), the open, inquisitive stare of early childhood that is based in curiosity and wonder. His dance communicates emotional and physical intimacy, drawing us in to the tenderness shared between himself and another dancer where the stare has the potential to give rise to interpersonal synchrony. Kuppers (2009) speaks of an erotic language that is not predicated on sexual contact, but rather on an intimacy at what she calls the ‘borderlines’. This sequence is an eloquent expression of that intimacy, where the gentle caressing movement of brushing away a strand of hair with a finger, the resting of a head on another’s arm, provide contact at the borderlines of selfhood, where intersubjectivity takes on a sensual meaning.

The duet begins with a camera shot of Marcus in a kneeling position in the foreground, stretching upwards with his gaze raised. Again, the muscular tension in his body is evident as the camera focuses on his torso; ribs rise and expand, fingers extend as one arm reaches forward towards the camera, constantly shifting in small adjustments as the arm rises. His other arm crosses his body, coming to rest with his hand and fingers creating an image that suggests an inverted crown on his forehead as his eyes briefly gaze into the camera. His focus shifts downwards as Ayabe, his partner in the duet, comes into the camera shot from below. Marcus’ extended hand caresses her head as she rises and the caress is continued by his other hand as it lowers, their bodies folding into each other. Ayabe’s eyes remain closed as their heads meet, creating an intimate moment loaded with sensuality. Ayabe begins to rise and Marcus, with a gesture of wonderful tenderness gently strokes her hair away from her face.

Like the lifting of the glass, this could be interpreted as a gesture requiring intense concentration in order to achieve a perceived goal, where his specific form of bodily control is seen as an obstacle to the achievement of that goal. Instead, the viewer shares a moment of intense intimacy, heightened by Ayabe's closed eyes as she rests her head on his thigh, suggesting a shared contact between the two where Marcus is the initiator of the sensual exchange and Ayabe the passive receiver of pleasure.

This dislocation of cultural expectations, where the disabled man becomes the active embodiment of sexuality and intimacy, gives rise to another transitional moment that holds great transformative power.

The camera cuts abruptly to a new angle. Marcus and Ayabe appear to be lying on the floor one behind the other as Marcus head and upper torso fill the screen, with Ayabe's head coming to rest on his shoulder. Marcus looks straight into the camera, meeting the viewer's gaze as Ayabe becomes the active partner, brushing her face against the curve of his neck. Marcus has maintained agency through the directness of his gaze, in contrast to the previous shot where Ayabe's more passive presence was emphasized by her closed eyes. The camera again cuts abruptly to the next and final shot of this sequence. Here Marcus is kneeling, with Ayabe reclining to one side with her gaze directed upwards as her head rests against his body. Marcus' gaze slowly focuses forward, again directly to the camera and a third, shadowy female figure (Hawkins) momentarily appears, supporting Marcus' head as she kneels beside him. The scene fades.

Throughout this sequence, the spatial levels defined by the camera do not privilege one body type over another. Body parts are isolated so that the eye is drawn to the delicacy of each movement as it occurs, with all the physical and emotional closeness that is implied. This is in stark contrast to many other duets where one dancer is identified as disabled. Cooper Albright (1997) speaks of such a duet between a man using a wheelchair and a nurse figure in

a performance of *Flashback* (1992), choreographed by Tom Evert as a collaboration between two American companies, Tom Evert Dance and Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels. This performance took place over twenty years ago, when integrated dance was still in its infancy. It could be considered a very fitting metaphor for the limitations of trying to adapt an existing aesthetic to accommodate a corporeality for which it was not designed. In an analysis of this performance, Cooper Albright points out that the choreography fails to explore movement possibilities inherent in various kinds of bodies, but rather reinforces the hegemony of able bodied movement with ‘dancers on wheels being used as static architectural devices to frame the dancers on legs’ (1997:69). In the duet between the nurse and the man in the wheelchair (an able bodied dancer, by the way, playing the disability role), the male dancer is ‘treated like an infant’ as he is pushed around the stage by the nurse, who directs all movement action. ‘She is the one who touches him, teasingly sits on him, and yet admonishes him with a slap of her hand when he reaches out to touch her in response (ibid.).

This is a particularly crass reinforcement of the stereotype that is often portrayed of disability and intimacy, and it is only one layer of a very confused series of cultural signs. A non disabled dancer performing such a negative stereotype of disability, within a work created by an integrated company apparently in an attempt at lighthearted entertainment, creates a bizarre juxtaposition of many conflicting layers of meaning. When compared to the content of Kupperts’ choreography, *water burns sun* can be seen as the antithesis of *Flashback*’s vulgar portrayal of relationship, by creating an equality that frees the performers to fully explore their physicalities in relation to each other. The authenticity that this gives rise to is communicated to the viewer. Regardless of whether that viewer is unsettled by the feelings evoked or has the capacity to attune to the emotional communication within the movement, the choreographic intent of the work very successfully allows for each dancer’s physicality to be

explored fully, without the limitations of cultural disability imprints. Viewers' responses form another layer of enquiry that will be explored separately.

In mindfully avoiding negative symbolic representations of disability in the creation and execution of the work, whether that is through live performance or through filmed recording of the performance, it appears that it might be possible to create a milieu where openness to change may more easily come about. Of the three dance performances considered in this thesis, *water burns sun* offers the most evolved approach in embracing corporeal diversity. The use of a butoh-inspired choreography allowed for movement to be used in a way that became detached from existing patterns, and no underlying narrative or political intent beyond an exploration of embodiment distracted from the quality of that movement.

#### **5.4 Theorizing the interactive gaze**

Kuppers' notion of borderlines is a very apt construct in theorizing the impact of such a performance. When this duet excerpt from *water burns sun* was used to illustrate a presentation delivered at an international dance conference (London, 2011)<sup>xxxii</sup>, it provoked some strong reactions from audience members. Through bringing viewers to these borderlines in the choreography, predictable narratives of disability were unhinged creating a liminal space where familiar symbolic signposts no longer existed. Depending upon people's preconceived perspectives of disability, reactions ranged along a continuum that could be divided into dismay and disgust at placing disabled and non disabled dancers together in such a performance, a wondering response suggestive of Garland-Thomson's baroque stare, and delight and pleasure in a choreographic exploration of intersubjectivity. It could be argued that each response allowed for potential growth that would not have been possible if stereotypical symbolism had been activated within the performance. This idea will now be explored further, as changing the way people look is a fundamental means of changing how people relate. It is also useful to

begin to consider different viewer responses from an evolutionary perspective, similar to that used to critique *GIMP*, *Diagnosis of a Faun*, and *water burns sun*.

The use of the camera in screendance can be responsible for bringing about either a reinforcement of existing perceptions, as in the promotional video for *Prognosis of a Faun* as already discussed, or for connecting with borderlines that have the potential to free the viewer from existing patterns of perception. The viewer's gaze in a live performance can be engaged in exactly the same way. Theodore Bale, reviewing a performance of Latsky's *GIMP* in the online *Dance Magazine*, discusses the effect of being allowed to stare:

as a child, I was taught never to stare at disabled persons. I remained curious into adulthood, however, the dancers in *GIMP* not only break this common taboo, they make the situation reciprocal. They stare back at you.

April, 2009

Bale's experience of looking at disability within the context of dance performance changed his perception of how one is allowed to look at physical difference. He was able to go beyond the confines of social conditioning in order to look at dancers with disabilities and engage with their presence onstage as performers. The concept of the voyeuristic, dominant male gaze (Garland Thomson, 2009:41) has been widely applied in disability dance performance theory, based on the notion of a corporeal presence (the dancer) that can be objectified and stared at (by the viewer). Finding ways to change this gaze can impact not only on the perceptions relating to differing corporealities within the performance, but also on the ways in which disability is perceived in a wider cultural context.

Dancers with disabilities have the potential to bring about a transformation of this objectifying stare into an interactive gaze, redefining the relationship between the dancer and viewer. To explore how this can come about, it is necessary to go back to the very beginnings of social engagement during infancy, where the basis of how each looks at the other is laid

down. As discussed earlier in this thesis, the infant engages the gaze of the caregiver and an interaction is initiated that brings the infant to a heightened level of arousal (Trevarthen, 2003). When this level of arousal becomes unbearable, as it inevitably must because the infant is only learning to self regulate at an emotional level, the infant and caregiver disengage. The infant is given time to re-establish equilibrium. This ongoing interactional dance of the gaze provides a safe, holding environment in which the infant can grow towards psychic integration and separation from the primary caregiver as ego identity is formed (Schore, 2002). The sense of self is created through the recognition of the other, and so the act of looking becomes the basis for interpersonal synchrony (ibid.). It is not until the gaze becomes socially regulated during early childhood that it turns into the stigmatizing stare, and the child is taught to stifle what Garland Thomson (2009) calls the baroque stare. The baroque stare is one of wonderment, it is not contained by rationality or desire for mastery, it is a recognition of the unknown, an intense engagement with the other. As such, it becomes a shared experience where both starrer and staree are empowered to create new insights. This type of staring ‘strives toward knowing by reducing unfamiliarity, if it is not short-circuited, it can be coaxed toward transformative interaction’ (Garland Thomson, 2009:194).

In viewing dance, permission is tacitly given to engage in the baroque stare, the stare of infancy and early childhood. Dance performance unravels the familiar ways of looking at disability - the blank stare that negates and makes invisible, or the knowledge producing medical gaze when disability becomes hypervisible. The freedom to engage in the baroque stare when viewing dance opens up the possibility that the viewer can let go of existing perceptions in the creation of a new shared understanding of the dancer’s embodied presence, a ‘transformative interaction’ (ibid) that gives rise to interpersonal synchrony. This is the experience that Bale spoke about in his review of *GIMP*.

How we look at each other is an integral part of developing an interpersonal relationship, and the use of the baroque stare opens the way for a revised interpersonal relationship to grow between disabled dancer and viewer within the performance space. The exploration of interpersonal relationships has been the focus of many diverse schools of thought. Buber's *I/Thou* relationship (1958) where mutuality is created between two people, engenders a recognition of each other's humanity within a dialogic engagement. Buber states 'the relation to the *Thou* is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between *I* and *Thou*.' (1958:17). This immediacy of engagement is at the core of the relationship between dancer and viewer. Recent developments in neuroscience are uncovering the essentially social aspects of the human brain, demonstrating how we are 'hardwired' to seek interaction with others. (Trevarthen, 2003, Cozolino, 2006), providing a scientific framework for Buber's philosophy. The one common thread that runs through all human interactions is the first experience of relationship that occurs between an infant and the primary care giver (Hughes, 2007) and it is this primary experience that will form the basis of the relationship between dancer and viewer in the performance space.

Patterns of interaction are gradually built, arising out of the infant's chaos of somatic experience. The infant's needs are overwhelming in their insistence to be met and the first experience of successful relationship is created around the meeting of these needs. This is the basis of attachment and mutuality upon which relationships with the other are constructed (Winnicott, 1964). It can be hypothesized that the microcosm of the dance performance space allows for a disintegration of socially constructed perceptions of disability and for the possibility of using dance as a means of reawakening this early, somatically based form of relationship building. In dance performance, there is the potential for viewer and dancer to experience this shared recognition of each other as human, without the cultural interpretations of the disabled body as outsider. For an infant, 'the meaning of the world can only be acquired



in communication and collaboration with other people' (Trevarthen, 2003:67). In dance performance, it is possible for new meanings to be constructed where dance is the medium of communication, putting aside the mediating influence of existing narratives of disability. These new meanings are created when empathic attunement occurs in the viewer, arising out of the intentional movement of the dance, and the embodied presence of the dancer.

Neuroscientific research has begun to uncover the workings of the brain during infancy and the need for healthy attachment to precede optimal development of neural connections required for cognitive and emotional growth (Siegel, 1999, Cozolino, 2006). Predating this research, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott (1978) formulated the seminal idea that healthy attachment is based on the holding of the infant in both a literal and a figurative sense. Physical holding, proximity to the primary caregiver, provides a sense of wellbeing if that holding is attuned to the physicality of the infant. The sensitivity of the caregiver to the subtle physical cues of the child allows for an ongoing state of adjustment, where every shift in movement is accommodated within the safety of the holding. On a figurative level, empathic attunement between infant and caregiver fosters the development of relationship, as the caregiver reflects and responds to the infant's emotional state in each moment of interaction. These links between physical movement and empathic attunement, between action and the perception of action, and between cognitive processes and the development of emotional intelligence (Gallese et al, 2004, Cozolino, 2006, Siegel, 2007) are the core elements, from a neuroscientific perspective, of the value of dance performance as a site of change. Neuroscientist Cozolino states 'it makes sense that more primitive somatic and motor activation serve as the infrastructure of emotion, cognition and abstract thought.' (2006:204).

Following a path from the philosophy of Buber, passing through the psychoanalytic approach of Winnicott, new neuroscientific insights have recently been gained into the inner

(intrapersonal) world of the individual as it pertains to the development of social interaction through seeing and experiencing others' physical movements and actions, especially the development of attunement and empathy in interpersonal relationships. This growth in understanding has come about following the pioneering work of Vittorio Gallese and his colleagues in studying the mirror neuron systems of the brain (Gallese, 2003, Gallese et al, 2004, 2007). This is the process whereby humans create representations of other's minds; not only is the physical action seen, but the mental intention is also imagined.

This is an emerging branch of neuroscience and will be dealt with in depth in the next chapter. Daniel Siegel, in applying this research to human behaviour, has developed an interpersonal neurobiology through focusing on a study of mindfulness, where empathy and attunement to the other occurs through each attending to the other's intentions.

This is the essence of the power of dance performance from a neuroscientific stance. The viewer is given the opportunity to recognize and become attuned to the dancer's humanity through the engagement of the mirror neuron system, regardless of whether or not that dancer has a disability. When linked with the baroque gaze and the reawakening of a somatically based relationship between dancer and viewer as already discussed, a new understanding of disability can be created that leads to acceptance arising out of empathic attunement.

### **5.5 Creating bridges: from philosophy to neuroscience**

In introducing the element of neuroscience, there is the danger that a theoretical framework will be created that loses sight of the essential humanity of interpersonal relationships. Before embarking on a deeper exploration of neuroscientific principles, it is important to contextualize this approach so that the scientific element of this study does not fall into the trap created by a purely cognitive understanding of dance in terms of relationship.

When a philosophical stance of Cartesian duality is linked to a cognitive neuroscientific reductionist view of existence, a model of being is created that reduces life to a mechanistic brain-centred entity that does not allow for the complexity of interpersonal connections (McGilchrist, 2009, Blair, 2009). A great deal of research linking dance and neuroscience has remained within the scope of the cognitive. This approach stays within an extremely narrow focus, believing that any research must be placed in the domain of the empirical that can be either validated or falsified (McConachie et al, 2008). Philosopher and neuroscientist Alva Noë has been working at the intersection of philosophy, neuroscience and psychology, particularly in relation to perception and consciousness (2004). He has taken a phenomenological stance that recognizes the limiting Cartesianism inherent in a great deal of cognitive neuroscience, and it is his philosophical approach that has informed the scientific aspect of the development of this thesis.

Noë challenges the basic assumptions of cognitive neuroscience that consciousness is situated in the brain and that mind is something interior, an entity divorced from action and in its essence fundamentally computational. He defines consciousness as ‘experience, broadly encompassing thinking, feeling, and the fact that the world “shows up” for us in perception’ (2009:8), with the brain ‘facilitating a dynamic pattern of interaction among brain, body and world’ (2009:47).

Neuroscience in itself is not enough to theorize being in the world and the assumption that mind equals brain needs to be challenged. As science stands at present, there is no clearer idea as to how the brain gives rise to consciousness, any more than Descartes could explain how soul gives rise to consciousness (Noë, 2009). Like the interpersonal neurobiologists (Siegel, 2012; Schore, 2012; Cozolino, 2006.), Noë holds that ‘the phenomenon of consciousness, like that of life itself, is a world-involving dynamic process.’ (2009a:xxiii). The brain is of course a necessary element of the larger process of being, but the

role of embodiment and environment in creating each person's dynamic being in the world also needs to be fully recognized.

Noë's philosophical stance is an extremely useful way of considering the intersection of dance and perceptions of disability, as it recognizes the role of embodied presence in the world. Consequently, Noë adds a philosophical dimension to what could otherwise be perceived as a very limited scientific view of dance performance when considering neurobiology. In applying this theorizing to dance, and through collaborating with dancers and choreographers such as William Forsythe in recent years,<sup>xxxiii</sup> Noë's phenomenological model of thought has developed in a way that complements the confluence of neuroscience, dance and disability. In conversation with Forsythe, he states:

Dance is a beautiful modelling, an illustration if you like, a re-enactment of the basic situation that we are in, as embodied, socially and environmentally situated, dynamic beings. What we feel, what we see, what we hear, where we are, what our limits are, where the rest of the world begins, are articulated dynamically in life and in dance. So part of what makes dance fascinating as an art form, what makes it tantalizing and mysterious ... is the fundamentally embodied, dynamic character of human consciousness recapitulating this basic fact about how we live and what we are.

2009

Noë holds that dance should be viewed as a domain for any kind of radical experimentation, whether artistic or research based, and his concept of dance upholds the view expressed throughout this thesis that dance has the power to change perceptions of disability. Dance is a microcosm of the social and cultural environment that defines the differently abled body. It cannot be viewed within a sterile scientific framework that does not fully take account of interpersonal relationships. Any knowledge gained is tempered by the other aspects of being in the world that have been explored in this chapter, from the interactive gaze to the dialogic engagement of I/Thou, to the distanced but equally valid connection made through looking at dance on camera. It is within this frame of reference, of the body that becomes, that the neuroscientific elements of viewing dance will now be explored.

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<sup>xxiv</sup> As integrated dance had arisen out of the Disability Rights movement both in the UK and the USA, originally its main focus was inclusion and integration at a community level, with the emphasis being on political statement through performance. Judith Smith, Artistic Director of integrated dance company *Axis* in San Francisco stated that in maintaining this inclusive ethos, it was difficult to achieve artistic rigour when there was no formal training available for dancers with differing physicalities. This created confusion as the company tried to move from community based project to professional dance status, and funding bodies continued to perceive the company as a therapeutically driven enterprise. (Personal communication, August 2005)

<sup>xxv</sup> Whatley cites the work of Richard Rushton in 'Deleuzian Spectatorship', *Screen* 50:1 (2009):45-53.

<sup>xxvi</sup> In their keynote speech at the Present Difference conference in Manchester, January, 2010, 'biopolitical valorization of life in its inhabitation and reproduction of ableism as a condition of inclusion'.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Commentary of a promotional video posted on a fundraising website. See Kickstarter, Tamar Rogoff, (2011) *Prognosis of a Faun* Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2013. <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/2032557746/prognosis-of-a-faun-a-documentary>

<sup>xxviii</sup> Kuppers's artistic vision and rationale for creating her work *water burns sun*: I work often in hospice environments, as a community artist, with people in the last months of their lives, and also with cancer-survivor support groups. I was intrigued by the images and videos that I saw of this new technique: in them, cancer looks beautiful, lit up, in gorgeous colors. What does it do to someone diagnosed, to see their cancer this way? What would it mean, ethically, artistically, to show cancer movement, and to explore its different aesthetic dimensions? What does it mean to explore movement as a tracker for difference, but to not work with ideas of deficit or negativity, struggle or fight? How can we host the multiplicities of movements we hold inside, how do we fill the hollows of our bodies, hollows within and without? Olimpias Website, Available at <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~petra/alchemy.htm> Accessed June 13th, 2013.

<sup>xxix</sup> Programme notes for *Burning: An Olimpias Participatory Performance Installation*, Berkeley, July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2009. Accessed February 2nd, 2012 <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~petra/alchemy.htm>

<sup>xxx</sup> Hijikata's poetry as quoted in Jean Vifala & Nourit Masson-Sekine, (1988) *Butoh, Shades of Darkness*, Tokyo: Shufunotomo. p.75.

<sup>xxxi</sup> Here Kuppers is referring to Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'bare life' as posited in *Homo Sacer*, (1998), in relation to a mode of thinking about bodies, where the state of exception is understood as the threshold and the limit of the norm.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Unpublished conference paper presented by Eimir McGrath: 'Challenging the Crippling Stare; Dancing with Difference' at *Not Just Fred and Ginger: Camaraderie, Collusion and*

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*Collisions Between Dance and Cinema*. Annual conference of the European Association of Dance Historians, London, 14-16<sup>th</sup> October 2011.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> See William Forsythe and Alva Noë in conversation at the New York Public Library, October 10<sup>th</sup> 2009, where they discuss philosophical and neuroscientific aspects of dance. <http://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/william-forsythe-alva-noë> (Accessed 4th November, 2012)







## **Chapter Six**

### **The Dance of Intersubjectivity: The social connectedness of the human brain**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In the preceding chapters, three different dance performances that are inclusive of differing corporealities have been critiqued. Each one represents a point in the evolution of integrated dance that reflects an increasingly more sophisticated cultural awareness and acceptance of physical difference. A theoretical framework has been emerging that is grounded in the relationship between viewer and dancer and now this framework will be considered in terms of interpersonal neurobiology.

Dance in performance has the power not only to engage minds, but also to move hearts. It can generate the potential to trigger memories, awaken emotional responses and intensify the social experience of audience participation within each spectator. This is an area of enquiry that needs to be reconsidered in light of new scientific knowledge that can transform understanding of what is actually happening when dancer and viewer share the social experience of performance. The power of performance is contained in the interpersonal communications between all involved, whether performer or spectator. Through reconsidering these communications by applying recent discoveries in the field of neuroscience concerning mirror neurons, intersubjectivity and the development of empathy, there is the possibility that dance can be viewed in a new light as an effective agent of change in altering negative perceptions of disability.

Historically, there has been a recognition that dance can either uphold and express prevailing societal values, or alternatively can be used as a means of critically evaluating and

subverting the existing social order and so generate societal change (McGrath, 2013; Sklar, 2001; Thomas, 1996; Cooper Albright 1990; Foster, 1986). Theories of performance have tried to create an understanding of how and why this occurs, but until recently this understanding has remained largely within philosophical boundaries (Foster, 2011; Lepecki, 2004; Thomas, 2003). The possibilities contained in bringing about societal change through dance performance will now be considered by applying new discoveries in the field of neuroscience and particularly in interpersonal neurobiology. Together with the philosophical elements that inform this thesis, new emerging knowledge concerning how people relate to each other will be applied to the performance of theatre dance, to create a new interpretation of interpersonal interaction and potential change when faced with the disability of another. As neuroscience is a vast field of enquiry, the focus will be limited to considering the application of neurobiological research to critical and analytical readings of the creation of intersubjective relationships within theatre dance performances. By opting for such an approach, this research thus proposes to complement the existing theories of performance mentioned above with socio-neuroscientific discourses in its quest to change perceptions of disability in dance. It is important to note that, although there have been radical developments and changes of direction within the discipline, the neuroscience narratives that are drawn upon in this work are widely accepted and have a strong scientific base. Indeed, some of the more recent discourses are still within the realms of the speculative; yet, the mere fact that new discourses and viewpoints have been formulated is regarded, within this context, as core to the creation of potential neurobiological links that offer an alternative to the more established philosophical arguments made in favour of dance as transformative. The emergence of neuroscience and the application of neuroscientific knowledge to dance studies in recent years will thus be discussed, in order to contextualize such uses of neurobiological investigations. Given that this work remains primarily a dance studies work, throughout this chapter, both the discussion of and the

references to neuroscientific research are not intended to assert any expertise in the field. It is worth reiterating here that the focus of this thesis is on the potential for such research to provide a novel viewpoint in relation to dance performance and changed perceptions of disability, that may influence critical thought in this field.

## **6.2 The ‘Decade of the Brain’ and the emergence of neuroscience.**

Man has been trying to understand and influence the functioning of the brain for millennia and there is evidence of crude interventions even as far back as 10,000BC, with skulls discovered that showed signs of recovery from trepanning. Trepanning is a procedure that involves drilling a hole through a section of the skull, a practice that has been described as the first form of brain surgery (it was considered up until relatively recently to be a cure for headaches, mental disturbance and demonic possession)<sup>xxxiv</sup>. In the 1960s and 1970s, behavioural psychology<sup>xxxv</sup> dominated scientific research and any possible links between brain, body and unconscious processes were generally considered to be areas of speculation that were unscientific and as such, unworthy of serious consideration. The emphasis was on external, observable and measurable behaviours.

Between the 1970s and 1980s, the focus had begun to shift as researchers began to explore the links between external behaviours and the underlying internal cognitive processes such as memory, attention and language acquisition. The emergence of this new field of cognitive psychology<sup>xxxvi</sup> became the dominant focus of research until the 1990s, a decade which saw an extraordinary leap forward in brain science research, fundamentally transforming the knowledge base concerning the functioning of the human brain. At the beginning of this era, in 1990, the United States Congress declared the ‘Decade of the Brain’ which supported the surge in research in the U.S., while simultaneously throughout the world a wealth of other

research projects were exploring new areas of scientific inquiry regarding human brain development<sup>xxxvii</sup>

This emerging field of neuroscience was defined as ‘any or all of the sciences, such as neurochemistry and experimental psychology, which deal with the structure or function of the nervous system and brain’ (OED). This was the period when new technologies made it possible to create increasingly accurate images of actual brain function rather than static brain imagery, largely aided by technological developments such as Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) that allow real time activity within the brain to be visualized and tracked. Discoveries using these new technologies have caused some previous assumptions about brain function to be completely revised, particularly concerning plasticity. This was largely brought about by the pioneering work carried out by neuroplasticians such as Michael Merzenich and V.S. Ramachandran (Doidge, 2008) whose discoveries have revolutionized the treatment of neurological conditions previously thought to be irreversible<sup>xxxviii</sup>. This has resulted in a new awareness of the brain’s lifelong ability to learn and adapt, a fundamental element when considering brain activity and performance as agents of change, which will be discussed in depth later on in this chapter.

Merzenich’s and Ramachandran’s discoveries, along with the discoveries of other neurobiologists, have had a huge ripple effect throughout science and into the arts and humanities, bringing about major paradigm shifts in academic thinking about brain activity and interpersonal relationships.<sup>xxxix</sup> Neuroscience is now very much interdisciplinary and has expanded in many directions, collaborating in diverse areas such as, for example: linguistics, medicine, philosophy, psychology, computer science, chemistry and performance studies (Schore, 2012). The introduction of neuroscience into the world of the arts has opened up a new way of thinking about performance and the mechanisms of connection that exist within performance space. Until very recently, the theorizing of dance performance from a spectatorial

point of view was very much contained within philosophical discourse and is only in recent years beginning to enter the domain of scientific thought. For example, see Susan Leigh Foster's discussion on the theorizing of empathy and how it has transferred from philosophical to the scientific fields of enquiry (2011:164-65). The conceptual thinking of how performance is perceived and understood remained very much in the realm of conjecture, but then growing research into the working of the human brain brought a whole new scientific underpinning to theories of viewing performance (McConachie, 2007), which highlighted the fundamental significance of interpersonal connections and communications within performance space.

Previously held arguments, that these connections and communications are primarily filtered through the culturally coded signifiers embedded in symbolic thought (derived from philosophers such as Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva) can now be questioned as a result of recent discoveries in the field of neurobiology. Embodied emotional life is now fully accepted as a valid subject for scientific research<sup>xl</sup>, but as yet, this subject has had little significant impact on performance studies. The rethinking of the primacy of interpersonal relationships contained within experiences of theatre dance opens the way for a revised hypothesis regarding viewing dance. This thesis argues that dance can awaken a mode of relating that is a fundamental part of life at a pre-linguistic level and this is what gives such power to dance performance.

Since the beginning of the twenty first century, there has been an increasing interest in the application of new discoveries in the field of neuroscience to the realm of performance studies (for example, Hagendoorn, 2005; Foster, 2011; Gallese and DiDio, 2012) Initially, this impacted more on the cognitive understanding of how performers learn in rehearsal and physically interact with each other within performance, reflecting a predominantly cognitive behavioural approach to the study of human interactions (McConachie, 2007; Cook, 2007).

More recent research has focused on identifying the brain processes that are

activated when looking at dance movement in order to make aesthetic judgements (Hagendoorn, 2011; Calvo Merino et al., 2008). This link with dance and neuroaesthetics has identified a possible role of visual and sensorimotor brain areas in an automatic aesthetic response to dance. In general, this branch of dance research has remained within the limits of sensorimotor activity, an aspect of dance that is more accessible to quantifiable and measurable modes of enquiry. The application of neuroscience to pre-existing theory was explored by Bruce McConachie (2007), who argued that existing theories of performance such as those based on psychoanalysis and post structuralism were no longer adequate for creating an understanding of constructs such as attention, empathy and conceptualization. He stated:

Both semiotics and phenomenology divide the viewing experience between the subjects and objects...In contrast, the science noted above has discovered an interactional relationship that occurs prior to any cognitive distinctions between subjects and objects and that does not rely on signification.

2007:565

His suggestion was that theatre studies should now consider becoming more open to scientific validation through a process of ‘falsifiability’, rendering performance open to ‘the rigorous evaluative procedures of good science’ (2007:556). He argued for the application of cognitive neuroscience to the theories held within performance studies as it uses a process of falsification, that is, whether a theory can be reduced to either true or false in order to provide explanations that best fit the available evidence. These explanations can then be used as incontrovertible arguments against other less scientific theories. McConachie’s approach recognizes the fundamental importance of interpersonal relationships, but it is limited in that it is based on his acceptance of cognitive neuroscience as the fundamental paradigm for the assessment and interpretation of human experience and relationship. As such, it diminishes the application of neuroscientific thought, because the acceptance of cognitive neuroscience per se is ultimately an attempt to reduce what is essentially a dynamic lived experience, shared between

participants at an interpersonal level, to a sterile, mechanistic approach that can be contained and reduced to neural firings within an essentially computerized version of being.

McConachie's embracing of recent developments within the field of neuroscience certainly opened the way to extending this interdisciplinary approach to performance studies, and a useful link has been created between science and the arts where a phenomenological approach can be enhanced by new understandings in the field of neurobiology. However, increased knowledge of how brains actually receive and process information in social contexts, and build relationships through this fundamental intersubjective connection, has allowed for a more thorough and diverse scientific investigation of the interactions and interpersonal relationships between the spectator and performer.

This inclusion of intersubjectivity into scientific investigation has heralded a new era, and discoveries that have since been made have revolutionized the scientific understanding of brain growth and development. This is especially true of early infant development and the necessity of social interaction, which directly impacts on each person's ability to become attuned to another (Trevarthen; 2003; Siegel, 2012a; Schore; 2012). This is a basic aspect of early development that has potential to be applied to how dancer and viewer connect, and will be discussed in greater depth further on in this chapter. One unfortunate consequence of the development of a neuroscientific approach was the increased emphasis on brain function as being the 'be all and end all' of human interconnectedness, with mind as an element of brain that can be reduced to a collection of neurochemical and physiological phenomena, as evidenced by McConachie's approach.

Fortunately, neuroscientists have now accepted that this approach has severe limitations in attempting to create an understanding of human relationships (Siegel, 2012a; Cozolino, 2006; Schore, 2012). Cognitive neuroscience stops short of fully embracing this vital interpersonal element by maintaining its quite limited mechanistic view. This thesis does not

subscribe to such a reductionist opinion and upholds the alternative view as stated by psychiatrist and neuroscientist Daniel Siegel that ‘the mind is both embodied in an internal physiological context and embedded in an external relational context.’ (2012: xxv).

In 1992, psychologist and neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp coined the term Affective Neuroscience, within which interpersonal neurobiology<sup>xli</sup> can be placed, in order to distinguish this field that specifically studies the neurobiology of emotion from other areas of more cognitively based neuroscience. As mentioned earlier, this is the field of neuroscience that may be considered to be largely within the speculative domain. Still, there is a constantly growing body of evidence that is providing increasing corroboration for the theoretical understanding of subjective feeling states. Panksepp’s work was very much discounted for many years (Feldman, 2007) but an increased knowledge base has actually confirmed the accuracy of his theories and research.<sup>xlii</sup> Internationally renowned neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2006:22) revised his own theoretical stance to accommodate this new accumulated knowledge, and has acknowledged Panksepp’s foresight.

Panksepp describes the difference between cognition and affect as:

...cognitions can be defined as the processing of information entering the brain–mind through the sensory portals; affects are better defined as evaluative felt states of mind that reflect evolved internal brain functions that code survival issues.

2009:231

The basic principles of affective neuroscience are that emotional processes, including subjectively experienced feelings, play a key role in the control of actions in humans. Emotional states are responsible for creating natural internal values that guide the complex behavioural choices that happen continuously throughout life. Thus, subjectively experienced feeling states not only help to guide and sustain existing behavior patterns, they also mediate in the learning of new behaviours, the fundamental aspect of behavioural change upon which this thesis is predicated. Together, these feeling states create what is understood as human nature (Panksepp, 1998). Interpersonal neurobiology builds on this basis and provides an in



depth study of how relationships and the brain interact to shape our mental lives. It is by activating these subjective feeling states through relationship in the direct experience of dance performance, not in isolated cognitive learning patterns, that changes may be effected in how disability is perceived. It is this area of neuroscience that now needs to be the focus of this study.

Schore speaks of the ‘paradigm shift from behavior, to cognition, to bodily based emotion’ (2012:4) in which scientific research has transitioned from studies of language based cognitive processes and voluntary motor functions, to emotional processing and embodied systems largely independent of and adjunct to cognitive processes. This is of huge significance when looking at the relevance of affective neuroscience to the study of dance performance. It makes it possible to move from the realm of the cognitive, analytical processes to the realm of experience based emotional growth, where relationship is paramount.

In more recent years, the boundaries between the cognitive and the affective are becoming somewhat blurred as the different specialities within neuroscience have informed each other in conceptualizing the process of relationship building. As Cozolino (2006:7) states ‘In addition to data from neuroscience and psychology, interpersonal neurobiology utilizes research from psychoanalysis, ethology, comparative anatomy, genetics and evolution.’ A fundamental feature of interpersonal neurobiology is the focus on neural systems that shape attachment, as social interactions are a basic requirement for brain growth, regulation, and health (Cozolino, 2006:8).

The essential primary notion here is that the brain can adapt to accommodate both healthy and unhealthy environments and sociocultural beliefs. Interpersonal neurobiology recognizes that the brain is a social organ that is formed through a system of experience dependent plasticity, so there is a constant interplay between the brain and social behavior (ibid.). This has marked significance for the hypothesis that viewing dance can change

perceptions of disability. It is through engaging this change process that negative sociocultural beliefs regarding non normative physicalities can be adapted to more positive belief systems. As this is an experience dependent process, it follows that increased experience of viewing dance will have a corresponding increase in the capacity to change negative perceptions.

This is one of the most rapidly developing areas in neuroscience and there has been an explosion of research activity with a staggering amount of new knowledge being created.

Affective neuroscientist Klaus Scherer states:

... just as the cognitive revolution of the 1960s has spawned the highly successful cognitive sciences, which link the disciplines studying cognitive function from different vantage points, the emerging field of affective sciences promises to bring together the disciplines which study the biological psychological and sociocultural dimensions of emotion.

2009:17

Prior to this neuroscientific revolution, the exploration of such relationships had been the focus of many diverse schools of thought including Buber's notion of the *I/Thou* relationship (1958) as already discussed, where mutuality is created between two people, a recognition of each other's humanity within a dialogic engagement. This immediacy of engagement is at the core of the relationship between performer and spectator. Recent developments are uncovering the essentially social aspects of the human brain, demonstrating how we are 'hardwired' to seek interaction with others, providing a scientific framework for Buber's philosophy of dialogic engagement. This 'hardwiring' provides the initial impetus for the infant to seek engagement with another, but it is the actual nature of that engagement that will eventually determine the social development of the individual. For example, an infant who does not have a responsive primary care giver may learn to avoid eye contact and vocal interaction, as no positive reinforcement is received (Schorer,1994). It is this plasticity of the brain to adapt to diverse emotional environments that contributes to the creation of either positive perceptions of disability, or to prejudice and discrimination. Each viewer engages with a performance through the lens of his or her own perceptions of disability and this engagement

is then mediated by the intentions of the choreographer, as reflected in the perceptions of disability contained within the performance. Consequently, the performance itself can potentially change discriminatory or prejudiced perceptions through offering a new experience of dance that incorporates corporeal diversity. Brain plasticity provides the core rationale that viewing dance can bring about changed perceptions, as there is a life-long potential for change to come about in the brain's social patterning through engagement with new experiences that are grounded in interpersonal relationships. The full realization of the potential for each performance in itself to bring about positive change, is contingent on that performance providing an adequate opportunity for the viewer to fully engage with the dancer at an interpersonal level. This can be variably influenced by any agenda contained within the choreography that is predicated on existing perceptions of disability.

Forsythe's informal 'resident philosopher' and neuroscientist Alva Noë, states:

the brain is not, on its own, a source of experience or cognition. Experience and cognition are not bodily by-products. What gives the living animal's states their significance is the animal's dynamic engagement with the world around it.

2009:165

Dynamic engagement within performance is not purely contained as the neural firings within the structure of an individual brain; it is in the meeting of two subjects in the intersubjective space 'betwixt and between' (to borrow Turner's phrase) that this engagement happens. In order to understand the systems of social connectedness that link one person to another, and the processes that impact negatively within these systems resulting in the marginalization and isolation of those that are considered different, it is necessary to think of the ways in which interpersonal contact and interaction come into being. Before connectedness can be considered however, the notion of self needs to be thought about, as there can be no connection with another without a sense of self.

### **6.3 Discovering the self**

The fundamental element of selfhood is the existence of the mind; defining what this actually means is no easy feat and has been the focus of philosophical and scientific thought from time immemorial. Noë's philosophical stance as outlined in Chapter Five has already informed the development of the notion of mind that is contained within this work, and now a neurobiological understanding of mind will be addressed. This will further develop the argument that interpersonal neurobiology can be used to provide a theoretical base for understanding the dynamic of viewing dance as a means of supporting the integration of people with physical disabilities.

The major shift that has come about following the revolutionary discoveries during the past twenty years, is the reversing of the belief in the disembodiment of mind, which had dominated philosophical as well as scientific thought regarding human existence (McGilchrist 2009:144). This is the Cartesian notion of the disembodied mind that can only connect with another through the mediation of a constructed or symbolic representation. As Soth (2006:46) stated 'After a few hundred years of Cartesian duality, enlightenment and positivistic reductionist materialism, we have ended up thinking disembodiment is a human condition.' The rejection of this duality, along with the now outdated Piagetian and Freudian models of human development that understood infants as egocentric and asocial beings, brought about a fundamental change that allows for new thinking regarding the viewing of dance performance. It is this stance that makes redundant any methodology that is based on linguistic precepts or Freudian theorizing.

As neuroscientists Francesco Ferrari and Vittorio Gallese state 'This new perspective in developmental psychology represents a breaking point with the Freudian and Piagetian legacy anchored to auto- and ego- centric assumptions.'(2007:73). This has been replaced with a recognition of the existence of primary intersubjectivity that underlies all

human development as described by Daniel Stern (1985) in his seminal work on early infant development. Stern's work conclusively establishes that the human infant is born already equipped with an innate ability and desire to relate to others. A parallel discovery was the ongoing ability of the brain to change itself as a result of experience (neuroplasticity), which completely upturned the previously held belief that the brain could be mapped in a static way, with specific abilities linked solely to specific areas, and brain growth and development being restricted to limited timeframes within the life span (Ramachandran, 2005).

In line with this argument, it can be safely affirmed that such discovery provides the scientific underpinning for the belief that dance can be transformative. As it is now accepted that emotional growth, along with cognitive growth, can take place throughout the lifetime and previously dominant neural connections can potentially be adapted and changed, as they are experience dependent. New experience creates new neural connections in the brain and if this experience is repeated, the neuronal connections become stronger. Two catchphrases regarding this neuronal activity that are widely used in neuroscientific circles very aptly describe these processes: 'use it or lose it' and 'neurons that fire together, wire together' (Siegel, 2012). Neuronal connections that are derived from previous experience can be removed and replaced through the occurrence of new adapted experience, providing the possibility of negating previously held belief systems.

The acceptance of intersubjectivity as a basic component in understanding how the human brain grows and develops, along with the discovery of neuroplasticity, has had a profound effect on the development of neuroscience and has revolutionized scientific understanding of brain function and the processes of the mind. Siegel offered a definition of mind that could be accepted by researchers across a wide variety of disciplines without being limited to only those aspects of human existence that can be quantified and numerically analysed. The definition he offered is that 'the mind can be defined as an embodied and

relational process that regulates the flow of energy and information.’ (2012b:xxvi). This definition recognizes that the process of being consciously aware is dependent upon the flow of energy and information that occurs both internally within the body and externally within relationships, and also the flow of energy and information that occurs between the individual and the external environment. People’s inner subjective lives are not observable or quantifiable in a precise scientific sense, but they exist nonetheless. Conscious awareness similarly cannot be quantifiably measured, yet it is this element of mind that holds three key functions; the ability to adapt through learning new skills; the ability to reflect on meaning; and the ability to actually change brain structure through the processes of learning, adapting and reflecting (Cozolino, 2006; Siegel, 2012a). All of these functions hold the potential to play a role in the process of change that can be initiated when the viewer perceives a dancer in performance.

The actual connection between these processes and the structures of the brain is yet another area that fails to find consensus among different disciplines, but Siegel’s definition of mind provides a general definition that is widely acceptable, where the brain is understood as the ‘embodied’ mechanism that allows the processes of mind to take place. In this definition, the brain could be considered to include the nervous system that is distributed throughout the body. Siegel describes mental life as:

...an emergent, self organizing process of this embodied and relational flow of energy and information. The mind is not separate from our bodies or from our relationships – it both arises from them and regulates them.’

2012b:1-6

Thus Siegel’s definition of mind, brain and relationships creates a triangle of elements that all combine to capture intersubjectivity in a way that acknowledges the complexity of human relationship without reducing it in a scientifically quantifiable, or purely evolutionary manner. With this understanding of mind, the actual structure and functions of the brain can be examined in order to see how emerging patterns of behavior have influenced man’s capacity to relate to his fellow man. In all of these reflections regarding the existence of mind and the

intersubjectivity that defines it, it is important to remember that in this context mind is embodied; it cannot be thought of as a separate disembodied entity, which was the prevailing belief before these neuroscientific advances. Embodiment is the core element in the interconnectedness between dancer and viewer as has been demonstrated in the analyses of performances in the previous three chapters.

In order to examine the influence of viewing dance from this interpersonal neurobiological perspective, it is necessary to look at the structure and mechanisms of the brain in some detail. This is not intended by any means to be a specialized discussion of brain development and function, but very much a generalist approach that does not require previous knowledge of neurobiology and will only focus on the mechanisms directly relevant to this discussion, i.e. the social brain.

#### **6.4 The structure of the brain**

The following description starts from the premise that the brain is not a fully formed structure, but ‘a dynamic process undergoing constant development and reconstruction across the lifespan’ (Cozolino, 2006:50).

The human nervous system is formed of two divisions, the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) and the peripheral nervous system (which provides communication between the central nervous system and the rest of the body). The brain is the main component of the central nervous system and is divided into two cerebral hemispheres that communicate with each other mainly through the thick fibrous band that joins them, the corpus callosum.

Complex patterns of activation on both sides of the brain are needed for most human activities and the neural fibres of the corpus callosum connect the corresponding areas of the left and right hemispheres. The left and right sides of the brain have gradually differentiated during the evolutionary process (Panksepp, 1998). The right hemisphere specializes in a non-

verbal, fast acting, holistic approach to experience and interaction; it is acceptive, receptive, and regulatory in its functioning. It can be described as being more internally focused, and assesses the gestalt rather than particular details of an event. The left hemisphere is slower acting, sequential, linear and time dependent; it concentrates more on externally focused attention and action, is logical and analytical, and deals with semantic memory representations that can be reduced to discrete packets of information rather than the 'big picture' approach of the right hemisphere. Siegel synthesizes by stating:

Because of these differences in processing, writers have often summarized the contrast between the right and left as that between the intuitive and the rational, between context and text, and between the polysemantic and monosemantic meanings of words.

2012:238

Popular psychology has tended to oversimplify this differentiation between the hemispheres, and has created dichotomies that do not recognize the complexity of interconnectedness that is a fundamental aspect of brain function. Specifically, a common misconception is that all emotion is situated in the right side of the brain. In fact it exists on both sides of the brain, but there is some differentiation in that the right hemisphere appears to be responsible for reading emotional and social cues from others and for the external expression of emotion by the individual. The right side of the brain also has more somatic 'maps', enabling it to assess internal body states and also to regulate body arousal. The emotions that lead to arousal of approach mechanisms appear to be situated in the left hemisphere whereas avoidance mechanisms appear to be situated in the right. (Siegel, 2012:242). This will be discussed in terms of reactions to disability that are both culturally influenced as well as inherent in the primitive drives that are responsible for avoidant behavior where potential threat is identified. The analysis of *GIMP* and the examination of the notion of the freak in Chapter Three has highlighted the ways in which these avoidant behaviours can be triggered and reinforced. In order to explore these and other complex emotional responses to viewing disability, it is necessary to first describe the relevant anatomy of the brain.



## **6.5 Neurons**

Neurons are the basic building blocks of the brain and nervous system and they communicate information from one to another via an electrochemical impulse. There are many diverse types, but a typical neuron is like a tiny ecosystem in itself, comprising of the main cell body (the soma) which takes in nutrients in the form of amino acids, generates energy through the conversion of amino acids to proteins, and adapts to environmental changes (Damasio, 2010). Each typical neuron has multiple extending branches called dendrites that generally receive the electrochemical impulses from other neurons, and an axon, a single filament which generally transmits impulses to other neurons. The axon is covered in a myelin sheath that acts as an insulator and allows the axon to conduct impulses more speedily and efficiently. Electrical impulses communicate from one neuron to another across the synapse, the connection that functionally links the neurons, by means of chemical messengers known as neurotransmitters. The electrical impulse is known as an action potential (Cozolino, 2006)<sup>xliii</sup>.

There are billions of neurons in the brain, each with up to 100,000 synaptic connections, making an almost infinite number of complex connections possible. This is a dynamic process as the brain is continuously creating new neural interconnections in response to each new experience. If neurons are not actively sending and receiving messages, they die (apoptosis). This has given rise to the adages already mentioned, ‘use it or lose it’ and ‘neurons that fire together, wire together’ in reference to brain development (Siegel, 2012). It is now known that the brain’s system of ‘pruning’ neurons is part of normal brain development, where the number of neurons is reduced and more efficient neural networks evolve. This happens particularly during adolescence as the brain matures (Giedd, 2008) but is an ongoing process throughout life. (Baltes et al, 2006). Each person’s DNA provides a genetic template for the construction of the nervous system from conception and this is relatively unchangeable, but there is another aspect of genetic involvement known as genetic transcription and this accounts

for approximately 70% of the brain's structure that develops after birth (Kandel, cited in Cozolino, 2006:40). This is important in terms of viewing dance performance, as it is the mechanism that allows for environmental influences to directly affect brain growth and development. This is how experience can reshape the brain (Kemperman, 2011) and change social perceptions of disability.

There are several different schemas created by neuro-anatomists for describing the structure of the human brain, but for the purposes of examining the development of social interaction, the model devised by psychiatrist and neuroscientist Bruce Perry is the most useful. This is the neurosequential model that recognizes the importance of the more primitive brain structures in social evolution (Perry, 2006). In Perry's model, the brain is divided into four main areas that are all interconnected: the brainstem, the diencephalon, the limbic system and the neocortex. This is a 'bottom up' model of the brain that recognizes the evolutionary development from the most primitive, least complex structure of the brainstem, through the increasing complexity of the diencephalon and then the limbic system, to the most evolved part of the brain, the neocortex. With each level the structure, function and cellular organization increases in complexity and Perry's model provides a useful means of integrating the evolutionary neurobiological element of the various social mechanisms that have been explored throughout the previous chapters.

## **6.6 Mapping the brain**

The brainstem is the most primitive area of the brain and is responsible for basic survival mechanisms such as regulating the heart rate and respiration, states of alertness and sleep, and some elements of the fight-flight-freeze response to danger. The cerebellum lies behind the brainstem and is responsible for the maintenance of balance, co-ordination, motor movement, equilibrium and muscle tone (Damasio, 2010).

The diencephalon comprises the thalamus, hypothalamus, the posterior portion of the pituitary gland and the pineal gland. It is situated between the brainstem and the cerebrum. This part of the brain works in conjunction with the limbic system in order to manage emotions and memories, and also maintains homeostasis within the nervous system and the body through temperature regulation, awareness of hunger and thirst and bodily activity. The hypothalamus plays a vital part in translating social interactions into bodily processes, as it is part of the system that converts interpersonal experience into biological structure, especially in terms of attachment (Cozolino, 2006:146). It is also the major hormone regulator of the body. An important aspect of the diencephalon is the fact that the optic nerve directly attaches to this part of the brain, without any mediation by the more sophisticated structures of the neocortex. This allows for the visual stimulus to bring about an immediacy of emotional reaction when viewing dance in a social context, without the influence of more symbolic, socially constructed interpretations, another vital element in creating a new understanding of viewing movement in terms of disability.

The limbic system co-ordinates the activity of various regions of the brain and the main structures which are relevant to this study are the amygdala, the hippocampus, and the nucleus accumbens. The limbic system is thought to be involved in the development of attachment and processing events into memory, especially autobiographical memory where experience is stored in a sequential and narrative format. The limbic structures also create affect and meaning, and the inner sensation of emotion. As Siegel states 'The limbic zones and the brainstem, the subcortical areas, combine to influence our motivational drives and the activation of our basic needs for survival and for affiliation and meaning.' (2007:35). Current research in this area of neurobiology is at the cusp of transforming theory into scientifically validated knowledge regarding the building of relationships (Panksepp, 2012). Consequently, a neuroscientific approach to understanding the value of dance performance as a means of

changing viewer perceptions of physical diversity holds valuable potential, as it has been suggested. An example of this can be seen in the application of such research to the notion of freak. Understanding the functions of the limbic system in general, and the amygdala in particular, offers a thought-provoking interpretation of possible reactions in the viewer when attending a performance such as *GIMP*.

One of the basic functions of the amygdala is to act as a warning system, inhibiting interaction with others who might potentially pose a threat, and it operates through two types of response: a rapid response system which is mediated by the thalamus, and a slower, more controlled response which is operated via the hippocampus and cortex. This is a very primitive biological mechanism, which originally developed in order to ensure survival in the face of danger, and it is the mechanism that triggers the reflexive reaction commonly known as the ‘fight-flight-freeze’ response. For this to occur, the sense organs (eyes, ears, tongue, skin) provide input through the thalamus which then activates the amygdala to initiate a rapid bodily response, ensuring an immediate reaction to the perceived danger (Damasio, 2010:113). This process operates at an unconscious level, with neurons firing to register the event and then activating the appropriate response, all within a time frame of seven milliseconds. The amygdala’s reaction is partly based on previous learned experience and this is one of the fundamental mechanisms through which early social learning comes about. The slower response mechanism of the amygdala, which occurs via the hippocampus and cortex, acts at a more conscious level. This is the response that is particularly relevant to viewing bodies that do not conform to the ‘norm’ as it is more adaptive, influenced by previously learned responses that are the product of the social environment. This function of the amygdala contextualizes what is seen in light of social perceptions and also mediates the fast reflexive response, making adjustments so that the subsequent, more voluntary response has a level of conscious awareness and control.

It could be hypothesized that the functioning of the amygdala may be central to both the creation of a perception of disability as ‘other’, and also to the process of changing such perceptions of disability through viewing dance. As the amygdala responds to viewing a differently abled body, allowing adjustments to be made subsequent to a positive experience, it may be possible that the neural pathways linked to a reflexive fear response can be ‘rewired’, replacing a reflexive response with a mediated response. This could be the process that is activated in the baroque stare and will be discussed in greater detail further on in this chapter.

The neocortex is the most evolved part of the brain and it is here that all higher intellectual functioning is situated, organizing conscious, sensory and motor experiences as well as all learned interactions, and its growth is experience dependent (Damasio, 2010:309). It is primarily a thick, convoluted area made up of six layers of cells, and is formed by the temporal lobe, the frontal lobe, the parietal lobe, the occipital lobe, the insula and the cingulate cortex. Each lobe is represented on both sides of the brain and has specialized functions. The main functions of the temporal lobe are auditory processing, receptive language and memory; the frontal lobe regulates executive functioning, language, abstract thinking, motor behavior and directed attention; the parietal lobe links sense experience with motor abilities, creating the sense of the body in space (proprioception); the occipital lobe is mainly involved in visual processing, and the insula and cingulate cortex link limbic activity to cortical networks (ibid.).

These two structures are often considered part of the limbic system because they act as an interface between the lower limbic regions and the higher cortical areas, integrating widely separated areas of the brain. This region links the perception of other people’s communications to a broad spectrum of neural firing patterns, helping to create integration between all aspects of understanding of others’ actions and intentions, from the somatic to the social (Cozolino, 2006:55). For this reason, the functioning of the insula and cingulate cortex are also fundamental to the process of bringing about changed perceptions of disability through

dance as they link the conscious, cognitive perceptions of physical difference to the unconscious, affective states that are activated when looking at the unfamiliar.

In creating an anatomical map of the brain, it is important to state that controversy exists in scientific circles as to the accuracy of delineating between different regions in terms of function (Siegel, 2012). Research has not yet reached anywhere near a level of certainty because of the high levels of neural interconnectedness between these areas which have not yet been accurately mapped. It can be stated though that the limbic system and associated structures are anatomically connected to a broad range of circuits both in the neocortex and in the more primitive brain structures (Damasio, 2010). The limbic system appears to carry out a vital role in co-ordinating activity from all regions of the brain, especially in terms of self awareness, empathy, memory, emotion, regulation and attachment (Siegel, 2012).

In all of this anatomical information, it is important to remember that the brain is a social organ, as defined in the next section, and there has been a radical shift in understanding certain elements of brain function; however a great deal of research is still at a speculative stage. It is clear that previously held theories regarding labeling specific, discrete areas of brain function are not an accurate representation. For example, as noted above, laterality is not a discrete concept with cognition and emotion clearly divided into left and right hemisphere activity; as Siegel postulates:

An emergent quality of living a vital and flexible life may come from an openness to bilateral functioning involving many ways of knowing. The brain is designed to integrate its functioning.'

2012:258

Through this integrated functioning of the brain, a deeper understanding can be attained of how patterns of social interaction evolve, and how they can be adapted through novel experience. This is how each person develops a perception of disability. These patterns have their roots in genetic imprinting and primitive reflexes involving novelty seeking and reacting to fear, as well as acquired social behaviours. These elements will now be considered.

## **6.7 The social brain: the first relationship**

The one common thread that runs through all human interactions is the first experience of relationship that occurs between an infant and the primary care giver (Hughes, 2007) and it is this primary experience that will form the basis of the relationship between dancer and viewer in the performance space. The human brain has evolved as a social entity, it is hard wired to interact with others and as already stated, recent advances in neuroscience have demonstrated how brain growth and development can only occur through a strong foundation in interpersonal relationships (Siegel 2012a, Cozolino 2006, Schore 2012, Trevarthen 1993). At a prenatal level, a synchronicity is already being created between mother and foetus through the shared experience of biological and physical rhythms. The mother's heartbeat, breathing, the bodily actions of everyday life such as walking and the act of speech, all provide an interweaving of rhythm and movement that shape early experience. The intrauterine environment of auditory, vibratory, proprioceptive and kinaesthetic stimuli provide the earliest form of attunement (Trevarthen, 1993).

Even before birth, the foetus is responding to the emotional states of the mother via the transmission of her neurochemicals through the placenta. The mother's body rhythms and voice patterns create the earliest interpersonal connections which all influence the developing brain. For example, a chronically highly stressed mother will transmit increased cortisol levels to her unborn child, bringing about brain changes that increase the child's sensitivity to stimuli that startle or trigger a fear response (Bergman et al, 2010). Suppose the mother's stress rises in situations of conflict where vocal patterns linked to aggression or fear are heard by the unborn baby, it is quite likely that neuronal connections are already being created within the baby's brain that will provide a heightened reflexive response to this combination of increased cortisol level and voice patterns of similar pitch and intensity (ibid.). Consequently, at birth the

baby is already hypersensitive to experiencing a stress response in certain environmental situations.

At a somatic level, this attunement continues to develop postnatally through the physical holding that provides the continuation of shared rhythms already experienced. Psychoanalytic psychotherapist Suzanne Maiello considers these shared rhythms, and posits a connection between the rhythmicity of maternal embodiment providing the music of the life dance, and the holding of the infant in early attachment and attunement patterns where mirror neurons provide the fundamental basis for the development of empathy through rhythmic movement and sound. (Maiello, 2001). It seems that rhythmical qualities of the earliest interpersonal experiences become part of a deeply rooted knowledge of how to relate to other human beings. This is an inbuilt mechanism that can be accessed when viewing dance, as these pre-linguistic ways of being are awakened by meaningful movement and shared rhythm.

There have been many research studies which have analyzed the maternal voice and the use of ‘motherese’, those singsong vocalizations of mother to infant that are found globally. (Stern, 1985). The tone of voice used, the pitch, and the variation all create a deep connection with the infant and are a vital element of the bonding process.<sup>xliv</sup> The co-ordination of expressions and movements that build up between caregiver and infant create reciprocal proto-conversations that are the building blocks of empathic attunement. The use of nursery rhymes as a means of interacting with infants and young children is universal. Every culture has a range of rhythmic sequences that reflect the neurological patterning that has taken place prenatally. The verbal content is very much secondary: it is the communicated rhythm that reflects the beat/ pause, beat/pause link with the presence/absence of the mother, along with the proprioceptive and kinaesthetic stimuli in the holding, and the emotional content of the interactions that provide the earliest form of attunement. Developmental psychologist Colwyn Trevarthen’s research with newborn infants has shown that a baby as young as twenty minutes



old will interact with an adult, ‘demonstrating coherence of its intentionality and its awareness of a world outside the body, and especially a world that offers live company.’ (2003:57). Patterns of interaction are gradually built, arising out of the infant’s chaos of somatic experience. The infant’s needs are overwhelming in their insistence to be met and the first experience of successful relationship is created around the meeting of these needs. This is the basis of attachment and mutuality upon which relationships with the other are constructed.

It can be hypothesized that the microcosm of the dance performance space allows for the possibility of using dance as a means of reawakening this early, somatically based form of relationship building. The links between early attachment, the experience of attunement through the gaze and through rhythm can all be activated by the primitive responses that are generated by rhythmic movement and music. Trevarthen and Schögler have researched the connection between singing, dancing and attunement, stating:

Of all the ways we human beings share company, and communicate being alive, active and aware in our intricately mobile bodies, singing and dancing, the breath and activity of music, are the most elemental and persuasive. .... There are messages in the polyrhythmic way our two-legged bodies move with pulse and accents that can be varied to express the subtleties of will and consciousness to others.

2007:281

It is rather unfortunate that in discussing patterns of attunement that create a sense of belonging and community, Schogler and Trevarthen presumptuously referred to ‘two-legged bodies’. It would be hoped that this was thoughtlessness rather than exclusion. However, this statement does give a very good example of how insidious exclusion can be, no matter how unintentional.

Even these earliest of human interactions start to shape the social brain and as the primitive mechanisms that are responsible for ensuring survival all come into play, patterns of relating are being created at a neuronal level (Hughes, 2007). Thus the experiences assimilated form the template upon which future interpersonal interactions will be based, and this is where the potential is present for creating an intolerance of difference based on physicality.

Fortunately, the human brain has a high degree of plasticity, the ability to change itself, which has been widely researched and recognized. It is this ability that underpins the hypothesis that viewing dance can change social perceptions of disability. This will be explored further through looking at the development of cultural beliefs and behaviours as they are initially shaped by the brain's inbuilt survival mechanisms and innate drives which have passed down the evolutionary ladder and are present in every human.

### **6.8 The social brain: group interaction**

It is impossible to think of individual development without considering it in terms of social interconnectivity, as neuroscientist Louis Cozolino states ‘ we now recognize that individuals are inseparable from the group, that groups themselves process information and that we live in a field of mutual interpersonal regulation’ (2006:300). Physiologically, there are several areas that form the core of the social brain: the anterior cingulate, the orbito-frontal areas of the pre-frontal cortex, the frontal portions of the temporal lobes, and the amygdala. The anterior cingulate plays a role in social bonding and attachment, and is also an association area for motor, tactile, autonomic, visceral and emotional input. The orbito-frontal areas of the pre-frontal cortex are considered the apex of the limbic system as they connect both with the limbic system and the cortex, acting as a zone of convergence for both sensory and emotional information, mediating information regarding the individual's internal and external world. This is the part of the brain where like and dislike of others is mediated (Cozolino, 2006:255). The frontal portions of the temporal lobes link all areas of the brain to integrate senses, primitive drives and emotional material, enabling rapid responses to take place in conjunction with complex environmental inputs.

The amygdala, as already mentioned, plays a crucial part in regard to states of fear. Its primary role is to ‘modulate vigilance and attention in order to gather information,

remember emotionally salient events and individuals, and prepare for action' (Cozolino, 2006:166). It sends and receives messages directly from the visual system without any involvement of consciousness. If the amygdala registers a visual stimulus as potentially dangerous, it feeds back to the visual system through a series of processes that actually create new neural pathways that reinforce the fear response for any future similar experience. Any mental representations that become attached to this specific response also become triggers for activating the fear response. When this understanding is applied to reactions of fear that occur on encountering disability, it demonstrates how the reactions of others can be integrated into an individual's fear response, making the social milieu in which disability is encountered a powerful experience. This is the response already alluded to, triggered by freak show performance where difference is hypervisible as 'monstrous other'. Seeing someone with a disability in a dismissive setting is very different to seeing that person in the liminal containment of theatre performance, where there is potential for openness and curiosity to counteract a reflexive fear response. This is possible because the social brain acts as an editor of lived experience, combining incoming social information with the traces of past experiences that are stored in implicit (unconscious) memory, and as such it orchestrates each person's response to their social environment, shaping their social interactions with those around them (Cozolino, 2006). In viewing performances such as *GIMP*, it is this second response that hopefully will be triggered. As the dancers with differing physicalities are viewed, there is time for the reflexive, instinctual fear response to subside, to be replaced with Garland Thomson's baroque stare. It is the neural process described above that provides the scientific explanation for the stare that Garland Thomson intuitively knew.

The development of the social brain is a process that begins at birth. By noticing others' emotional reactions, infants begin to link these with their own internal emotional states and so even the most subtle bodily expressions of others' emotions start to build up a complex

web of social and emotional knowledge within the child. Looking at this from an evolutionary point of view, it can be surmised that group behavior arose out of the need for survival originally, where conflict within the group could only be damaging (Panksepp, 1998). As a result, individual awareness of the emotions that played a role in regulating the group (such as trust, admiration, pride, guilt, shame and contempt) became more heightened within each person's internal regulatory system. Social rules and conventions would have become established and these cultural influences began to shape the development of the social brain. So, biology and culture became intertwined. It could be speculated here that this may provide a neurological explanation for the cultural drive to regulate those who are different. As discussed previously, this was a feature of the Industrial Revolution, when radical changes in social structure made it imperative that normal bodies were recognized as having economic value, whereas those with disabilities were perceived as valueless, and consequently were incarcerated.

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (2010:289) believes that the development of the social brain was the foundation of the arts, where the need for cultural homeostasis led to the development of the use of narrative in creative ways. Stern (1985) had already described what he labeled 'proto-narrative', the sequence whereby a mother and infant interact with a clear beginning, middle and end, creating a non verbal narrative based on emotional content and physical, gestural and facial communication. This is the basis for the storytelling and mythmaking that occur in every culture.

Fuelled by the primitive drives of curiosity and meaning making, the birth of the arts would have started to shape social behavior. Damasio argues 'Art became a privileged means to transact factual and emotional information deemed to be important for individuals and society' (ibid. p.296). He goes on to state that through the arts, the nourishing of emotions and feelings can be induced, social organization can be promoted and most importantly, the arts

can compensate ‘for emotional imbalances caused by fear, anger, desire and grief.’(ibid) This is the inherent value of dance. As it is an art form that is embodied, the immediacy of a dance performance connects directly with the emotional parts of the brain that are not primarily under conscious control (predominantly the amygdala and the limbic system). By connecting with these areas that influence perceptions of disability, the neuroplasticity of the brain can be utilized to reinforce empathic attunement and undo social learning that upholds discrimination. Visual stimuli allow for these connections to be made because of the direct connection through the optic nerve to the limbic structures that process emotions.

In early infancy, eye gaze is a primary mechanism for the development of social behavior. Infants as young as thirty six hours have the capacity to visually discriminate between happy, sad and surprised facial expressions (Field et al, 1982) and the mutual gaze between an infant and primary caregiver is vital for the process of brain organization and the development of new neural pathways that bring about brain growth. The experience of positive emotion is triggered by the release of naturally occurring opioids, the ‘feel good’ neurochemicals that affect brain function, when the gaze is held between an attuned caregiver and the infant (Hughes, 2007).

However, during the second year of a child’s life the use of eye contact and facial expression becomes more developed as a means of controlling and inhibiting the child’s actions. Looks of disgust and disapproval can bring about a feeling of shame in the child, a state which if sustained is potentially toxic from a neurobiological perspective because of the neurochemicals produced (Schoore, 2012:98). When this is combined with the act of shared attention (the automatic response to look in the same direction and at the same object as another person) this becomes a shared social communication. Thus it is easy to understand how if an adult displays a negative emotional response upon seeing a person with a disability, this does not have to be based in verbal communications of dismay, disapproval, or perhaps revulsion.

The eye gaze and facial expression alone are clearly communicating complex emotional information to the young child when looking at physical difference. Very young children constantly check their parent's facial expressions as a means of gauging the safety or otherwise of a situation; this is known as social referencing and is one of the ways in which an adult's internal world and belief system are transferred to the child. As Cozolino (2002:176) states: 'The eyes and the information they communicate are windows to our interpersonal histories as well as our souls.'

The immediate physiological response to a visual stimulus that is either threatening or perceived to be negative is to look away. Here lies the biological foundation for the invisibility of disability, the averted gaze that denies the humanity of the object of that gaze. In a social context, the brain has evolved to be conservative in its responses because in early social environments, this was the most effective way of ensuring survival. The act of seeing an unknown face triggered an anxious/fearful response as every new face signaled a potential rival for resources, environments, and mates, or a potential aggressor (Cozolino 2006:253). This primitive reaction to the unknown is still imprinted into the human psyche and despite the best intentions of the higher cognitive processes to respond in a socially appropriate way, a common human reaction to unexpectedly seeing a disfigured face or disabled body is a visceral response that signals potential danger and a concurrent facial expression of surprise and sometimes even horror or fear (ibid). Although this is almost instantly overcome where there is a conscious desire to respond in an accepting way, that initial reflexive response may have already registered at a non verbal level with anyone who witnessed the exchange. Again, young children, through the actions of the mirror neuron system (which will be discussed more fully), attach emotional meaning to these responses when such an interaction is witnessed, and receive a neural imprint that will be activated when next faced with similar circumstances. This is the dehumanizing gaze that contemporary freak show performance aims to deconstruct through

confrontational performance that meets this rejecting gaze, in an attempt to regain agency and neutralize the fear that has been engendered.

The development of the social brain is very much intertwined with early attachment experience and the attunement of the parent to the child's emotional states, as well as the learning brought about by the child internalizing the parent's emotional states. These interactions bring about the child's understandings of the world that then get built into the internal narratives that inform future behavior. The development of a proto-conversation based on attuned emotional responses 'creates the psychological, social and emotional context from which narratives will gradually emerge.' (ibid. p 178). Consequently, the quality of these interactions will have a direct impact on the development of positive or negative perceptions of others. The emotions supported in affectionate engagements between adult and infants, and soon between peers and with other acquaintances of all ages, are essential to the regulation of normal brain development and to the development of the mind's dialogical and creative consciousness, and thus to the common sense of cultural awareness (Bråten and Trevarthen, 2007:23).

This is a fundamental aspect of the argument that dance can provide a means of linking into this pre-verbal process and thereby recreate an experience of positive interpersonal connection that has the potential to modify existing negative neural pathways, enabling the development of new connections based on a positive experience. Others' emotional states trigger a visceral emotional template that then provides a sense of what the other is experiencing. Because this happens at an unconscious level, the template can be influenced by the emotional reactions of others, leading to emotional contagion that has the potential to be either positive or negative. Individuals internalize what others are acting out in their presence and the amygdala is particularly sensitive to the interpretation of facial expressions (Trevarthen, 1998). The positive aspect of this system is the experience of empathy, which can

be described as a ‘hypothesis we make about another person based on a combination of visceral, emotional and cognitive information’ (Bråten and Trevarthen, 2007:203), which involves resonance behaviours along with many other levels of neural processing that form the social brain. Resonance behaviours are just one element of the mirror neuron systems that are present in the human brain, and these systems need to be considered for the role they play in advancing social cohesion and group identification (Cozolino, 2006:200).

## **6.9 Mirror neurons**

The human nervous system is designed in such a way that it allows people to gain a sense of other people’s lived experience through simply watching them, and this forms the basis of learning by imitation. fMRI studies have shown that there is a large scale neural network of mirror neurons in the anterior insula and the amygdala, supporting the hypothesis that empathy is related to the activation of these neurons (Jacobini and Mazziotta, 2007). Research has also suggested that viewing another person being emotionally expressive, while the viewer is still, results in the relevant emotional receptors in both people’s brains being activated in exactly the same way. (McGarry and Russo, 2011:180)

The mirror neuron systems in the motor domain of the brain, along with other mirroring neural clusters outside the motor domain, together provide the mechanism of ‘embodied simulation’. Ferrari and Gallese (2007:73) explain embodied simulation as ‘an automatic, unconscious, and pre-reflexive functional mechanism, whose function is the modeling of objects, agents, and events.’ This action of the mirror neuron systems is not necessarily under conscious control and this is the basis of intentional attunement to others, where the possible meanings of their actions and feeling states are evaluated and then attributed to that person. So, by matching what is observed with the person’s own experience of executing that action, understandings of the other’s intentions and associated feeling states can be made



(*ibid*). The discovery of mirror neurons has had a major impact on research into intersubjectivity and although much of the most recent research into mirror neurons is still within the bounds of speculation, it offers an extremely useful concept for exploring relationships. Neuroscientist Marco Iacobini has created an understanding of the mirror neuron system in humans, stating that their role in intersubjectivity is to create an interdependence that is based on shared existential meanings, leading to a deep interpersonal connection (Iacobini, 2007). Siegel has expanded this understanding of how people relate to each other in a way that has particular relevance to the relationship between viewer attunement and dance performance:

humans create representations of other's minds, not only is the physical action seen, the mental intention is also imagined. This is the neurological foundation for the social nature of the human brain. Mirror properties of the nervous system provide an important window into examining the nature of culture and how shared ritual behaviours within our families, schools, and communities enable us to resonate with each other's internal states, including intentions.

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Mirror neuron systems are a relatively recent discovery. In the mid nineties, Italian researcher Giacomo Rizzolatti (1996) and his colleagues were studying brain function in monkeys in a laboratory setting, when an unexpected and serendipitous discovery was made. If a monkey carried out an action, a group of neurons in that monkey's brain fired, which were identical to the neurons that fired when the monkey observed another monkey (or human) carry out the same action. This was the first indicator of the existence of mirror neurons that underlie the process of embodied simulation.

Mirror neurons form the basis of intentional attunement to others where the possible meanings of their actions and feeling states are evaluated and then attributed to that person (Ferrari and Gallese, 2007:73). This has been confirmed by research undertaken by Iacobini and Mazziotta, who carried out fMRI studies that demonstrated the existence of a large neural network involving mirror neuron areas in the amygdala and the anterior insula of the human brain, providing evidence of a direct link between the mirror neuron system and empathy,

which has since been corroborated by the results of other similar studies (2007:215). This can act as a counterbalance to the primordial fear response that is built in to the amygdala, the response that reflects an evolutionary state of avoidance when anything or anyone unfamiliar is encountered. As early survival depended on the recognition of others who might be threatening, the brain developed these fast response fear reactions to ensure safety through almost instant fight/flight body responses.

This lives on in the human brain and can be triggered by any form of difference, but fortunately this fear reaction has the potential to be mediated through the slower response mechanism which allows the brain to engage the higher processes, the necessary time to think and reflect, and consequently override the fear response. Repeated experiences that accommodate this process can rewire the neural fear network that responds to a particular sequence of inputs, consequently changing the fear response to an approach response, the primordial recognition of a non-threatening situation that underlies social acceptance. Recent research into prejudice (in this case racially based prejudice) demonstrated that by increasing exposure to and knowledge of people of different race, the fear response to difference can be inhibited (Phelps et al, 2003). This research was further developed to establish that change can occur but requires intention, attention and time (ibid.).

As racial prejudice is activated within the same neurological system as prejudice against disability, it stands to reason that the findings would support the notion that exposure to dance performance by people with disabilities can have a positive influence in reducing the neurological fear response and attendant prejudice. The inherent difficulty with the realization of this is the fact that there are relatively few opportunities to attend dance performances that include physical diversity. Apart from the very small number of companies that actually focus on 'integrated' or 'inclusive' dance, the possibility of staging works is hindered by such things as lack of funding and lack of accessible venues.

Disgust is another primitive emotion that is designed to reflexively protect from danger. In research conditions where the experience of disgust was being explored, the same sector within the anterior insula was activated by exposure to a disgusting smell, as well as when seeing an expression of disgust on someone else's face as they smelled the same odour (Gallese et al, 2004). The findings of this study concurred with many others that the insula contains neural networks that become active both when the participants experience disgust and when they see it in others. Cozolino (2006:266) states 'Our aversion to corpses and bodily damage puts us on guard and makes us wary of both potential predators and toxic micro-organisms' (as in the reflexive response to the tastes and smells of food items that are identified as disgusting). He very evocatively continues 'Overall, the emotion of disgust is one of avoidance and expulsion, either from the body or from one's presence'. Cozolino expands this notion of disgust, not just confining it to the noxious smell and bad taste of tainted food, but also to 'the variety of situations in which the purity of objects or behavior is compromised and there is "contamination".' (2010:117). He links the actions of the human disgust response to the social emotion of contempt, which he considers to be a metaphor for moral disgust.

When this system is thought of in terms of disability, the correlates between primitive reactions and societal responses to disability are striking. The avoidance and expulsion of the disabled body from the social sphere, leading to marginalization and cultural invisibility, has been discussed in depth already in this thesis. Neurobiology now offers not only a potential rationale to make sense of these very primitive behaviours, but also offers the means by which change can bring about repair.

### **6.10 Mirror Neurons and changing minds**

It can be hypothesized that through the functioning of the mirror neuron systems, dance can be utilized to undo the negative perceptions of disability. By viewing dance

performance, the spectator can fully engage with the embodied presence of the disabled dancer in both a visceral and emotional manner. Siegel has stated:

We use our first five senses to take in the signals from another person. Then the mirror neuron system perceives these ‘intentional states’, and by way of the insula alters the limbic and body states to match those we are seeing in the other person. This is attunement and it creates emotional resonance.

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This emotional feedback system that is focused on the empathic internalization of another’s intentional movement is the basis of the process of mirroring that occurs in Dance Movement Therapy (McGarry and Russo, 2011). The same mechanism takes place during performance, providing an insight into the humanity of the dancer being viewed. Mirror neurons appear to be the link between empathy and body sensation and through the dancers’ postures, gestures, facial expressions and meaningful movements, emotional responses are elicited in the spectator (Gallese, 2003). This is the neurological foundation for the social nature of the human brain and is the basis of empathic attunement.

This partnership of the biological approach to understanding human behaviour, along with a psychological frame of reference grounded in attachment theory, has led to an expanded version of what it is to be human. In dance performance, it is possible for new meanings to be constructed where dance is the medium of communication, putting aside the mediating influence of language. These links between physical movement and empathic attunement, between action and the perception of action, and between cognitive processes and the development of emotional intelligence (Gallese et al, 2004, Cozolino, 2006, Siegel, 2007) are the core elements, from a neuroscientific perspective, of the potential for dance performance to be understood as a site of change. Cozolino states ‘...it makes sense that more primitive somatic and motor activation serve as the infrastructure of emotion, cognition and abstract thought.’ (2006:204). Dance that includes corporealities that are not perceived as ‘normal’ provides opportunity for a reparative experience for those who react to disability with

the primitive, reflexive responses that reinforce negative perceptions. In a performance setting, there is time and space to create a more adaptive, empathic response that will literally rewire the brain to initiate a more positive reaction. Through repeated experiences of viewing performance, the primitive reflexive responses become redundant as implicit permission to stare creates new neuronal pathways based on curiosity. The innate human desire to relate then activates empathic attunement where the performer's embodied presence resonates with the viewer's own embodiment thus providing the potential for changed perceptions.

Neuroscientific research is travelling on a voyage of discovery that has moved from a starting point of apparent cognitive certainty to a speculative land of emotion and intersubjectivity that is challenging the existing theories of how we think, feel, know and communicate. There has been a paradigm shift in focus from the scientific studies of behavior within a purely cognitive frame, to looking at interactions and brain function from an integrative perspective that combines the previous mechanistic cognitive approach with emotional and social elements of human interactions. The findings of neurobiologists such as Damasio, Schore and Siegel have all supported the notion that the emotional content of interpersonal communication can be reframed by awakening pre-linguistic pathways in the right brain and limbic system, and it is this notion that is now being applied to the viewing performance.

Through examining the functioning of the brain in creating interpersonal connections, the neurological basis of emotional responses such as fear, disgust and curiosity can potentially provide insight into the mechanisms that lead to exclusion and discrimination. For example, knowing that an immediate reflexive fear response to difference can be mediated by a slower response based in curiosity, it is possible to appreciate how dance performance could facilitate the change mechanism in the brain.

When neurobiological knowledge is combined with the discourses of disability emerging from the sociological and philosophical strands already explored in previous chapters, a more complete argument for dance performance as transformative has evolved. The framework that has emerged recognizes the primary importance of an intersubjectivity that is grounded in the embodied presence of both performer and viewer. Neurobiology offers a means of theorizing this intersubjectivity within a scientific framework, recognizing the biological antecedents that give rise to negative perceptions of difference and also the neurological mechanisms by which these perceptions can be adapted through social and emotional growth, in a non verbal manner. The experience of prelinguistic connection with the other through the gaze of the spectator can be the starting point at which viewer and performer connect outside the constraints of a subjectivity coloured by culturally generated signification, allowing for dance and music to be socio-cultural agents of change.

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> See Gross, C.G. (2002) 'Trepanation from the Paleolithic to the Internet.' in R. Arnott et al. (eds) *Trepanation: History, Discovery, Theory* Lisse: Swets and Zeitlinger. pp 307-322

<sup>xxxv</sup> Behavioural Psychology is a branch of psychology that deals with the observable actions and states of both animal and human subjects. Originating with the work of J.B Watson (1878-1958), and developed by psychologists such as B.F. Skinner (1904-1990) and A. Bandura (1925- ), it focuses on researching external measurable behaviours without involving constructs such as mind, emotion and internal physiological states. For a more detailed explanation, see Homans, George C. (1978) 'Behaviourism and After' in A. Giddens and J. Turner *Social Theory Today* Stanford: Stanford University Press pp 58-82.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> Cognitive Psychology developed from behavioural psychology and can be broadly defined as the study of how the brain receives, processes, and makes use of sensory information. See Balota, David, and Marsh, Elizabeth. (2004) *Cognitive Psychology: Key Readings*. New York: Psychology Press.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> See the Library of Congress website: *Project on the Decade of the Brain* [ibid.loc.gov/loc/brain/public.html](http://ibid.loc.gov/loc/brain/public.html) Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2013

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Michael Merzenich undertook groundbreaking research into the plasticity of the brain's specific processing areas – brain maps. He demonstrated through his research that brain maps can alter their borders, locations and functions and are not fixed, as previously believed, but are dynamic throughout the life span. He was also directly involved in the invention of cochlear implants. (Doidge, 2007:45-92)

One of V.S. Ramachandran's most significant discoveries was the role of neural plasticity in creating sensations of pain in amputated limb sites, as well as chronic pain responses that remained after an injury had healed. His work highlighted the brain's ability to create new neural pathways and for adjacent brain maps to take possession of redundant brain mapping areas (such as the brain map that previously registered the physical state of a since-amputated limb). (Doidge, 2007:177-95)

<sup>xxxix</sup> For a comprehensive view of the history and cultural implications of changes in thought regarding the brain, see Iain McGilchrist (2010) *The Master and his Emissary* New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>xl</sup> There are many neuroscientists researching human emotion (affective neuroscience) from both an evolutionary and a developmental perspective. Jaak Panksepp, Antonio Damasio, Daniel Siegel and Joseph LeDoux have all been influential in the development of this field.

<sup>xli</sup> Daniel Siegel offers the following definition of interpersonal neurobiology (IPBN): 'A consilient field that embraces all branches of science as it seeks the common, universal findings across independent ways of knowing in order to expand our understanding of the mind and wellbeing.... This field explores the ways in which relationships and the brain interact to shape our mental lives. IPBN is meant to convey the embracing of everything in life from society (interpersonal) to synapses (neurobiology).' in Daniel Siegel (2012) *Pocket Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology* New York: Norton.

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<sup>xlii</sup> One such example is his inclusion of play as one of the basic drives in human and animal behavior, which has now been generally accepted in the field of neuroscience. See Panksepp, 1998, 2012.

<sup>xliii</sup> For a more thorough description of the anatomy of the social brain, see Louis Cozolino (2006), *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships* New York: Norton.

<sup>xliv</sup> Researchers at Duke University, David Schwartz, Catherine Howe and Dale Purvis (2003) have investigated voice as a potential origin of the structure of the chromatic scale. Their research demonstrated that the human vocal tract is designed in such a way that the vibrations of the vocal cords create a set of harmonics that are found universally in languages as diverse as English, Mandarin, Persian, and Tamil. This would suggest that the brain's hardwiring for language recognition underpins to some extent our capacity to recognize and create music.







## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion: beyond integration**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This study began with the intention of exploring the value of dance performance as a means of changing negative societal perceptions of physical disability, defined here as embodied presence which encompasses all forms of corporeal diversity. The work thus starts with the premise that viewing a dance performance that includes dancers with disabilities may possibly be a transformative experience. It was thus necessary to question what might influence the reactions of the viewer when looking at a differently abled dancer and to create a framework within which to carry out an exploration of such performances.

The creation of this framework was influenced primarily by the relevant theories, discourses and tenets found within dance studies. However, in developing the hypothesis that dance performance can be used to change societal perceptions of disability, an interdisciplinary approach was taken that comprised of three different elements. Firstly, Disability Studies, particularly the works of Snyder and Mitchell (2010, 2006), Garland-Thomson (2007, 1997, 1996), Linton (2007), and Hughes (2012, 2007), provided the underpinning for a diachronic analysis of the positioning of physical disability in western society. Secondly, the intersection of dance and disability needed to be considered in order to contextualize the placing of a differently abled body as dancer in a dance performance. The foundation for this exploration was provided by Kuppers (2010, 2009, 2003) and Cooper Albright (2001, 1997). Three specific dance works were utilized in order to provide a deeper exploration of this intersection of dance and disability. Critical analyses of these works were informed by theoretical underpinning derived from Laban (1960), and Foster (2001). Thirdly, the contemporary neurobiological

approach to the building of relationships, as based on the works of neuroscientists such as Siegel (2012), Schore (2012), Cozolino (2006), Gallese (2003), and Trevarthen (2003) needed to be explored in light of existing understandings of how interpersonal relationships are formed, particularly with reference to Buber (1958), Noë (2009), and Winnicott (1964). A scientific approach in itself would not be sufficient, as there was a danger that a potentially reductionist view of human interactions would limit the interpersonal aspect of connectedness (McGilchrist, 2009). Consequently, all these strands were interwoven in order to create a unified approach that considered all aspects of viewing dance performance that is inclusive of all corporealities. The validity of the premise that viewing dance can be transformative was tested by applying current knowledge and theory from the field of neurobiology within the context of existing theoretical stances regarding disability and performance, along with socially constructed notions of disability.

New discoveries in the field of neurobiology were used to create an understanding of why different perceptions of disability arise. Such an approach led to questioning what knowledge or experience can inform attitudes to disability, so that the dancer's presence is not defined by his or her disability, but by the interpersonal relationship that is created between viewer and dancer.

Recent discoveries in neurobiology offered the possibility for a new theoretical approach to be applied to examining how the disabled dancer is seen and is experienced by the viewer, what influences that view, and how positive change in perceptions of disability might come about. This led to a formulation of dance performance that recognized the diversity of approaches contained within different choreographies, and how they could influence the viewer's experience of disability through watching dance.

As a result of this exploration, a new understanding of the relationship between disability and dance has been formulated. By applying this neurobiological knowledge and

theory to dance performance, a framework that is grounded in intersubjectivity has now been conceived. This framework serves two purposes; firstly, to understand existing perceptions of disability and how change might be facilitated, and secondly, to provide a lens through which dance performance can be viewed in terms of inclusivity. As such, it recognizes the fluidity of perceptions of disability, as each individual's interpretation of the concept is formed by an accumulation of personal experience filtered through cultural value systems. Consequently, viewers cannot be considered as one unified corpus, but rather as contained within a spectrum that allows for a multiplicity of responses to viewing disability in performance. However, the one unifying element that is present within an audience is the innately social nature of the human brain. This is the underlying precept that is the basis for the argument that viewing dance can be explored from an intersubjective stance when examining interpersonal relationships.

## **7.2 Following the path of interpersonal neurobiology**

New discoveries in the field of neurobiology are shedding light on to how the human brain is designed to form attachments and to be social. As already stated, this research has been undertaken to complement existing theories of performance with socio-neuroscientific discourses in considering how to change perceptions of disability in dance. These discourses are firmly rooted in strong scientific knowledge. Although some more recent research is still within the realms of the speculative, the fact that these viewpoints have been formulated is regarded, within this context, as core to the creation of potential neurobiological links that offer an alternative to the more established philosophical arguments made in favour of dance as transformative.

From an evolutionary point of view, neurobiology is uncovering how the brain is initially 'hard wired' to act and react from primitive, emotional states when relating to others,

and how subsequent experience can literally change existing neuronal connections leading to the potential for adaptation of this hardwiring (Panksepp and Biven, 2012; Trevarthen, 2003). As these emotional responses were originally intended to ensure survival, they are generally instinctual and are activated in social situations before conscious awareness is triggered (Schore, 1994, 2012). A great deal of this research has been applied to the practices of psychiatry and psychotherapy as it sheds light on how individuals respond in times of stress, as well as providing a scientific understanding of how relationship is created, even prenatally (Trevarthen, 2001, Maiello 2001).

The application of this research to both relationship and stress was a significant factor in choosing to explore neurobiology as a means of formulating how the social perceptions of others can be related to dance performance. The human experience of recognizing difference in another will automatically trigger primitive emotional responses that activate caution and possibly alarm (Perry, 2006, Gallese et al, 2007). Repeated experiences of safety in such situations build new neural pathways that suppress the alarm response and awaken the positive responses that foster social connection and acceptance. The hypothesis was formed that viewing dance performance could provide such experiences.

In dance and performance studies, psychotherapeutic processes stemming from Freudian psychoanalysis have been influential in the creation of theory (for example, the works of Peggy Phelan and Elin Diamond), so precedence had already been set for the relevance of interpreting this form of theorizing in terms of performance. The major difference that is contained in this study is the fact that the framework of understanding developed here is not based in symbol and language, as ultimately all Freudian psychoanalytic thought is. It is based on a pre-verbal state of being that is fundamental to all human existence. As such, it is the contention of this study that this pre-verbal state of being provides a direct route to connectedness with the other that can be most easily accessed through embodied

communication, that is, dance. This is confirmed by neurobiological research into the mirror neuron system of the brain and the mechanisms for creating attachment to other humans (Gallese et al. 2007; Trevarthen, 2003; Siegel, 2012).

Formulating this framework was partially based on recognizing the fact that negative reactions to physical difference are part of the human primitive response system. Garland Thomson theorized this automatic reaction when she identified the baroque stare, as previously discussed in Chapter Five, the stare of wonder that is used by very small children when faced with an unfamiliar sight. She states:

Because staring strives towards knowing by reducing unfamiliarity, if it is not short-circuited, it can be coaxed toward transformative interaction'  
2009:195

Neurobiology now offers a scientific basis to Garland Thomson's explanation of this phenomenon, which she has very aptly labelled 'visual activism' (ibid.).

In the baroque stare, the immediate startle response is quickly replaced by the wondering stare that is part of the process of making familiar the unfamiliar, recognizing similarities, noting differences and assessing the level of danger inherent in the encounter. Caution and curiosity go hand in hand in this sequence, which can last from seconds to minutes (Panksepp, 2012; Trevarthen, 2003). Where there is no threat, the new sight is assimilated as a safe one and the process of social response becomes activated. The need to stare is biologically based but it becomes over-ridden by the social stigma attached to disability. From early childhood in western society, it is culturally ingrained in people to suppress this automatic stare reaction, and the suppressing reaction of others often triggers the shame mechanism in the child, the 'visceral experience of being shunned and expelled from social connectedness' (Cozolino, 2006:234). This mechanism becomes active at the time when very young children are absorbing the cultural coding of their particular environment (Trevarthen, 2003, Cozolino, 2006) and, where disability is stigmatized, shame becomes an inherent part of looking at

differently abled bodies. In order to reverse this stigmatization and shame, which is being reinforced by early social learning, it is necessary to find ways of providing reparative experiences.

The plasticity of the human brain is such that patterns of behavior and responses can be reshaped through experience, and this is possible throughout the lifespan (Siegel, 2012). Those viewers whose experience of corporeal diversity has not extended beyond this level of interaction, will thus experience, through dance performance, an engagement with the baroque stare, which, in turn, allows such a neuronal reshaping to take place. Dance performance provides a means of giving permission to stare in order to allow a change process to occur. When this permission is given, the viewer can go through the process that leads to integration of difference, from a position of startle and potential threat, through curiosity and familiarization, to acceptance and openness of social connection.

As a premise, this appeared to provide a solid basis upon which to build a revised understanding of viewing dance that could then be developed, to encompass the growth of an intersubjectivity grounded in relationship, fostered through viewing dance performance. However, neurobiology alone was not enough to create a new understanding of dance performance and potential change, other variables also had to be considered.

### **7.3 Drawing strands together**

This is an interdisciplinary study, and as such, it was necessary to find a means of interweaving these disparate strands in a way that would provide clarity and cohesion. Three dance performances provide the basis for this interweaving, Latsky's *GIMP* (2009), Rogoff's *Diagnosis of a Faun* (2009), and Kupperts' *water burns sun* (2009). Each was chosen because of its particular approach to including dancers with disabilities within the performance. *GIMP* foregrounded the disabilities of the dancers in an often confrontative manner when exploring



each person's movement potential. *Diagnosis of a Faun* utilized a dancer's physicality to play a pivotal role in a narrative based on a medicalized understanding of disability. *water burns sun* explored the movement potential of a dancer with cerebral palsy through his embodied presence in the work.

In this order, these three works could be interpreted as being representative of three diachronically evolving stages in the development of positive societal perceptions of embodied difference. They provided a vehicle with which to examine these stages and consider how each one could be actively present in viewers' perceptions. This approach would be overly simplistic if only the works themselves were to be used to explore the possible range of viewers' reactions. It was also necessary to hold in mind the fact that viewers' reactions are likely to be extremely varied, depending upon each individual's previous experience of disability. The aim was to uncover an evolutionary pattern of interconnectedness, which would allow for the viewer's life experience in areas such as relationships, education, dance experience, and exposure to disability issues.

Returning to the notion of the framework, in each stage, the experience of the viewer can be theorized in terms of the activated neurobiological processes and how these are integrated into forming a relationship with the dancer, through viewing dance. The performance can be analyzed in order to explore the ways in which it assimilates differing corporealities, as reflected by the intentions of the choreographer and the performance of the dancers. The viewer is free to engage in a performance at a level that reflects his or her ability to accept corporeal difference as a valid way of being in the world. A final layer of influence considered in this study is the media reaction to a performance, and how interpretations of a dance work can reinforce societal perceptions of disability as 'other', or can potentially offer an alternative means of looking at differently abled bodies. This was a particularly relevant

issue in the critical analysis of *Diagnosis of a Faun*. In light of these considerations, the three performances will now be reviewed.

#### **7.4 Following the evolutionary trail**

Physical disability cannot be neatly encapsulated into a unified framework containing clear boundaries and discreet elements (Siebers, 2008). As a concept, it has widely differing meanings depending upon the circumstances in which it is being defined. Hughes states a view that provides a very apt definition of negative perceptions of disability as it has unfolded throughout this study:

in the non disabled imaginary disability is an “ontological deficit”, a reduction of “*leib*” to “*korpor*”, human to animal, subjectivity to flesh, identity to excessive corporeal presence.

2102:17

This definition captures the diverse approaches to disability that needed to be acknowledged and explored throughout the analysis of how physical difference has been marginalized in western society.

##### **a. The First Stage.**

The least evolved understanding of disability, the pre-Enlightenment view of disability as monstrous freak, was explored within the chapter that focussed on *GIMP*. This performance used an essentially freak show approach to deconstruct the notion of corporeal difference (Kuppers, 2003). Prejudice was directly confronted, especially in the sequences that included Carter Long. In this type of confrontational performance, the neurobiological reactions of shame and disgust as related to prejudice and exclusion can be explored and deconstructed. Schore points out that in normal situations of disgust, the experience ‘provokes immediate suppression of visual attention and sensory rejection’ (2012:100). For those viewers

who are unfamiliar with diversity, interaction at this level invites the rejecting stare to persevere and engage with the presence of the differently abled dancer, and for rejection to be transformed into the baroque stare. Consequently, there is an opportunity to accommodate the neural changes from the potential for the primordial fear and disgust pattern being activated, to a position of increased familiarity and openness.

This connects to the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque, as discussed in Chapter Three, which has been used as means of contextualizing the disabled body in a contemporary freak show milieu. Kuppers has made the criticism that modern day theatre performance cannot be compared to the Carnival and grotesque of Rabelaisian times. She states that in true Carnival, there are no spectators, all are participants, whereas in modern day theatre, the audience takes on the role of spectator (2003:44). This thesis holds the opposite view. Based on the neurobiological argument of intersubjectivity, both viewer and dancer are considered equal participants in the creation of connectedness, thus justifying the use of Carnival and grotesque to create an understanding of the experience of contemporary freak show performance as potentially transformative, albeit in a very limited way.

## **b. The Second Stage**

Continuing on the evolutionary path, the next performance analysed encapsulated the medical model of disability that emphasizes the ascendancy of the average (Kuppers, 2003; Snyder and Mitchell, 2000; Davidson, 2008). *Diagnosis of a Faun* dealt with the notions of normalcy and the differently abled body as deviant. In this performance, there was a certain amount of crossing over between genres, as pedestrian movement was used along with a ballet canon. However, this was all framed within codified practice, thus maintaining the notion of a predominant genre being the normative, placing Mozgala, the dancer with cerebral palsy, as outsider. Even the use of a more contemporary idiom at the end of the narrative only managed

to reinforce the power of the norm, as the ballerina's idealized placing as sylph was taken away from her, reducing her to a more accessible, average heroine. The use of non dancers in the cast also created a sense of accessibility for viewers, as the perceived elitism of ballet was fractured when Kollisch, the untrained dancer, partnered the ballerina in a pas de deux. The use of the ballet canon thus played a somewhat conflicted dual role, both upholding a position of privilege over the unique movement style of Mozgala, while also representing the ascendancy of the normal over the elite, when it converged with the pedestrian in the pas de deux. This could be read as representative of the inevitable blurring of boundaries that occurs when attempting to define performance in terms of inclusion; as already stated, both viewer and performance offer a complex interweaving of factors that need to be considered when analysing the potential for dance performance to be transformative. This study has offered a means of doing so.

The other fundamental element present in *Diagnosis of a Faun* was the pathologizing of disability, which created a situation where Mozgala could be seen as heroic victim. This was compounded by not only being a central theme of the narrative, but also by the media response to the training regime that led up to his performance in the work. This coverage of the perceived rescue and transformation of a disabled man by a kind hearted and inspired choreographer did an injustice to both Mozgala and Rogoff, as Mozgala's dance performance was very accomplished. This received practically no attention in the media, but the perceived transformation of his disability became central to any coverage both in the press and online.

*Diagnosis of a Faun* is representative of the next level on the evolutionary scale of inclusivity. This is the level of pity, the perception of the differently abled body as victim which is a familiar interpretation to most people and probably the most intrinsic in contemporary society. This is the state of medicalization and pathologizing of disability that is concerned

with either cure or containment. Dance viewed at this level of intersubjectivity is guaranteed to be viewed sympathetically and favourably, but unfortunately this places it outside the remit of critical analysis, the position most famously taken by Arlene Croce in her non-review of Bill T Jones' work *Still/Here* in 1994. In Kuppers' words, this underlines the cultural assumption that 'people who are defined by their bodies are trapped by them' (2003:53). Defining the body in this way is one of the primary effects of medicalization of disability.

The darker aspect of the medical model of disability is contained in the emphasis on the normal. Scientific and medical analyses of bodily difference focus on an empirical approach to collecting data. This creates a dehumanizing objectivity that belies any attempt to engage with the humanity of the subject. This is the fatal flaw in the medicalization of disability, as it attempts to reduce the individual to a measurable agglomeration of symptoms, anomalies and controllable data. Through this depersonalization, the subject becomes merely a collection of measurable outcomes that completely eradicates any notion of individuality or agency. By viewing a dancer such as Mozgala in this performance, there is a confluence of two opposing messages to the viewer. The perception of disability as deviant is awakened by the medicalization of his body, and this is actively played out in the narrative. However, the emotional response of pity and consequent sympathy creates a level of intersubjectivity that potentially eradicates any primitive fear or alarm response. This again has limitations in terms of fostering inclusivity, and reflects the anomalies and contradictions often contained in perceptions of disability. It does, however, open the way for social interaction that goes beyond mere curiosity, as in disability framed as 'monstrous freak'.

### **c. The Third Stage**

The final, most evolved level of viewing dance that has been explored in this thesis is where there is an acceptance of corporeal difference, and the intention of the choreographer

is not subsumed or obscured by questionable narratives or other agendas. In this position of interpersonal interaction, the viewer potentially sees diversity rather than freak or victim. An equality is achieved that frees the viewer to see the dance and the dancer, in a way that does not reference disability as a prime element of the performance.

*Water burns sun* has been the focus of this chapter. This performance has an immediacy to it that makes it accessible to the viewer. It takes the discourse one step further by using *butoh*, a genre that breaks with cultural aesthetics and consequently removes any constraining boundaries that could potentially interfere with the interpersonal connection between the performer and the viewer. Kuppers asks the question:

Can we think outside the structure of the story, outside the habits of thought that make us sense and position ourselves in time and space, in power and knowledge?  
2009b

A dance performance that can allow this to happen frees the viewer to be fully present to the dancer, regardless of that dancer's physicality. This creates a level of intersubjectivity that is the expression of Buber's I/Thou position. The previous two stages of interaction that have been discussed do not reach this intensity of interpersonal connection. Kuppers offers a description of two alternative culturally prescribed positions, when she discusses that performance can either focus on 'performing' or 'being' (2003:56). To her, 'being' is the state when dance is perceived as being within the therapeutic realm, an inner process of discovery where the dancers are given the opportunity to experience themselves as 'whole' and 'able'. The emphasis here is on a societal perception of the dancer's own inner experience of his or her embodied presence in the world, a performance for the self that upholds a notion of heroic victim, as seen in *Diagnosis of a Faun*. Mozgala's body became the site of 'being' in Kuppers' sense of the word, as the physical changes that his body underwent during his dance training were interpreted by others as an inner experience of 'wholeness'. The perception that infiltrated practically every written review was that he was experiencing himself as almost 'able' for the

first time in his life. The viewer is inevitably placed in a position of objectifying the dancer when the body becomes a site of 'being' in this manner.

'Performing', however, is a political intervention aimed at challenging the viewer's hierarchical notions of 'able-bodied' and 'disabled'. In this instance, there is a split between the performer and performance as 'the "truth" of bodily expression is manipulated, cited and rewritten by the performer' (ibid). This is representative of performance that aims to deconstruct 'freak show' where the performer's 'truth', although claiming agency, is performed in such a way that disability is made hypervisible. Carter Long's performance in *GIMP* belongs in this category of 'performing' as described by Koppers. Although the aim is to challenge the viewer in a positive sense, this approach is again predicated on the placement of the dancer as embodying difference, rather than his physical presence being understood as being within an all-encompassing notion of diversity.

An alternative position for dancers with differing physicalities is one of un-knowing. This is the position that contains an openness to the being of the other. In Koppers' own choreography, she aims for:

a form of un-knowing that unfixes certainty about otherness, but that still remains able to act as a dialogue ground with our social and cultural reality'  
2003:11

Un-knowability is the evolved state developing from an acceptance of difference, recognizing the centrality of the need to maintain a non-verbal dialogic connection between dancer and viewer, which is the basis of an understanding of dance performance grounded in intersubjectivity.

Having explored the three evolutionary stages of intersubjectivity, a framework has been created that recognizes the various elements that can potentially influence the viewer in developing positive perceptions of physical disability, leading to a position where difference no longer defines either the dancer or the performance. This is the position where it is possible

to fully experience what Siegel describes as the ‘transitional moment of intersubjectivity, the ‘we-ness’ of being’ (personal communication, April 2013). Through viewing dance performance, these transitional moments can occur where a synchrony is created that is not coloured by variations in corporealities.

### **7.5 Beyond integration**

Exposure to dance experiences that embrace physical diversity has the potential to allow an acceptance of embodied difference to evolve. Neurobiological change can come about as culturally acquired responses to disability are undone, through the rewiring of neural connections responsible for acceptance of difference at a primitive level of being, bringing about a state of empathic attunement. The neural changes gained through viewing dance can potentially be generalized to other environments, bringing about a changed response to diversity in all realms of the person’s life.

However, it would be simplistic to believe that this is a panacea for counteracting the non acceptance of the disabled body within the cultural sphere. There are constant difficulties in considering disability. Politically correct stances create artificial barriers and divides; for example, difficulties relating to descriptive language can subvert the intention behind the use of the words.

The language used to label dance that includes differing physicalities is based on the premise of ‘outsider’. The words ‘inclusive’ and ‘integrated’ immediately alert the viewer to a recognition of difference. Even when these, or similar words are not specifically used, the choreography itself can be a declaration of difference. Latsky’s work straddles both of these positions as the title *GIMP* is in itself provocative. Even though her aims are stated as being purely to explore movement potentials with different physicalities, the content of the choreography is overtly confrontational. Rogoff’s work represents a much more subtle



declaration of otherness. Here there is no overt agenda to challenge viewers' perceptions of disability. However, the narrative is striking in its reinforcement of the medical model of disability. What is even more striking is the fact that this appears to have been done without a conscious awareness of the implicit message contained within the narrative. All of these aspects of performance have some degree of influence on the viewer and that must be considered when assessing the effectiveness of dance performance as an agent of change. The potential for dynamic interpersonal connection is present, but the multiple cultural factors that are already part of the viewer's lexicon when interpreting difference also have to be unravelled and deconstructed. Further explorations need to be undertaken regarding viewers' existing perceptions of disability, responses to viewing specific performances when considered in light of the implicit messages contained within the works regarding corporeal difference, and changed perceptions of disability following exposure to experiences of viewing dance that is inclusive of physical diversity.

When dance reaches a position of not having to declare the specific physicality of the dancer as an intrinsic element of performance, then intersubjectivity can occur in its full strength. In current practices of dance performance that do not need to label the corporealities as 'integrated', there is an ongoing theme of ambiguity which reflects Kuppers' notion of 'unknowing', and of liminality of the body that is in the act of becoming. It is in these spaces that true intersubjectivity occurs. Dance performances such as *water burns sun* provide the optimal opportunity to engage with embodiment from a position of true equality. The cultural encodings of disability can be left behind, and with all their signposts missing, a new perception of the dancing body can be created from the 'we-ness' of the intersubjective relationship that ensues.

The greater the opportunity to experience corporeal difference through the non verbal, embodied communication of dance, the more the culturally acquired perceptions of

disability can be undone. This has strong implications for the increased inclusion of dance within the educational system from an early age, as a means of counteracting the cultural imprinting of prejudice. Through activating the neurobiological structures that foster social acceptance and relationship, viewing dance has been shown to be an effective means of changing perceptions of physical difference. Translating this into the practice of dance within educational settings in order to achieve the same outcome is an area of further research to be explored. There must also be the potential to extend this theorizing into other areas of diversity where prejudice and exclusion can be counteracted through dance programmes at a community level. As the author of this study is engaged in dance practice in Ireland, there is a singular opportunity to explore these possibilities further. Not only is Ireland an environment where dance that is inclusive of all physicalities is very much in its infancy, but it is also one where social inclusion is becoming more problematic due to increased cultural diversity that is not being adequately supported and celebrated. Informed dance practice could have a substantial positive influence in creating a sense of community grounded in acceptance and inclusion.

## **7.6 Final thoughts**

Dance research has been described as:

a barrierless inquiry that attempts to move beyond either-or to consider both-and; a wholistic activity in which insights emerge at the confluence of streams of feedback from body, mind, and spirit; and a synoptic discipline that weaves together a range of outlooks drawn from diverse fields.

Dale et al.2007: 99

This is a particularly appropriate definition when applied to this study on the societal placing of disability, as it has drawn from multiple sources in order to create a unified theory that can inform dance practice.

The original intention of this research was to explore the value of dance performance as a legitimate site for bringing about positive changes in societal perceptions of

disability. Through an examination of the neurobiological mechanisms that govern the formation of attachment and the development of social interaction, a scientific grounding in the value of viewing dance has been established. Under the primary discipline of dance studies, this has been combined with both philosophical and sociocultural theory, and neurobiological knowledge regarding the creation of states of intersubjectivity that give rise to empathic attunement in relationship. Disability theory has informed the application of all these aspects to the exploration of dance performance as an agent of change. These relatively diverse fields all contribute to establishing the argument that viewing a dance performance by a dancer with a differing physicality holds the potential to positively influence perceptions of disability.

This study has also has provided a framework for viewing dance performances that include physical diversity. As many contemporary performances are still reflecting acquired cultural perceptions of disability as ‘other’, a neurobiological approach that is informed by disability theory offers a means of critically examining such performances.

The experience of emotional and physiological resonance is the basis of the relationship between the self and the other, before symbolic imprinting imposes a culturally driven interpretation of disability. It is this recreation of a state of empathic attunement in viewing dance performance, a state not bound by culturally acquired perceptions of disability, that can bring about change. Consequently, the notion of disability as transgressive is deconstructed, the humanity of the dancer is recognized, and the interpersonal relationship is experienced as transformative, so that physical diversity need no longer be disabling.



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## APPENDIX A

### Transcript of Personal Interview with Judith Smith, Artistic Director of Axis Dance.

San Francisco, 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2003

EM: Interviewer, Eimir McGrath

JS: Interviewee, Judith Smith

EM: What have been the biggest changes since the inception of the company?

JS: I think you have to look at the context we started in. Back in the 80s, the Independent Living movement was just getting started and disability politics were really active here, they wouldn't have been so active in other places. A lot of our early works had disability as the primary content and as time went by, we had a change of leadership because of artistic issues. Our art had got to a place that couldn't go forward, we needed stronger directing and new information that we weren't able to get on our own. We changed leadership in '97, our founding director left which was very sad because she had put her heart and soul into the company, but at the same time she couldn't let the company grow. I think she was very threatened that maybe other people would come in and do better work and inevitably, that's what happened. Our repertoire got much stronger, the company got stronger.

EM: Did you notice a difference in the audience's perception of the company before and after this change?

JS: Absolutely. In fact, we worked with a consultant a few years ago and she had been a member of the California Arts Council early on when we first tried to apply for a grant. She admitted that there was a lot of confusion as to whether what we were doing was therapy or art. When she started working with us as a consultant after '97, she said there was no question now that what we were doing was art, not therapy. That's one of the reasons that I thought we should start working with established choreographers, it would give us solidity in the eyes of other choreographers; presenters; critics; other dancers. It has really worked for us. I feel that integrated dance needed new influence. Some work by integrated companies on major stages just doesn't really belong there yet, it is still developing and I think that was true for us earlier, we performed in some major venues before our work was at a high enough standard, but now we're in a kind of second, nearly third generation company and the climate is a lot different for us.

EM: do you see any cultural differences between Axis and Candoco?

JS: I think that the biggest cultural difference is funding. When you have funding, you can do things. Our budget is pathetic, under \$300,000 and we don't have dancers on salary, they have day jobs for the most part and we can't do the amount of touring that we'd like.

EM: What has influenced your choice of choreographers that have worked with the company?

JS: There are a lot of people whose work I like but I don't think they could work with this company for various reasons. We tend to work with choreographers who have a wider vision of dance. Sonya Delwaide was the first choreographer we worked with and it was almost frightening how tuned in she was right from the start. We were used to working collaboratively and she was just like a stream of constant ideas. She had never worked with someone in a wheelchair before and in that particular piece, she had Bonnie in a manual chair, I was in a power chair, Nicole was on legs and she could just see the possibilities. It was not a collaborative process for the most part. She comes in and builds a team. We have done four pieces with her now and to a certain extent, we can attribute the way we move and partner, to our experience of working with her.

With Victoria Marks, it was incredibly collaborative. She came in with definite phrases for the three ladies on legs, and then she had us develop material from that. Janet Wong is like a brilliant computer for choreography. She would take a phrase that I made, then put legs on it for the other women. Bill T Jones had a different approach. He came with a piece of music that he had wanted to use with his own company and hadn't got around to it, but he really loved it and brought it to us. *Symphony in C major* was an incredibly difficult piece of music for us at that time because the entire piece had to be counted which was something we had not done before. Also the movement vocabulary was much more difficult than we had been working with.

Joe Goode used a very collaborative approach. He used a lot of choreographic ploys like getting us all writing, then he would have us try things that came from that. The exciting thing was that he would have us try things that we didn't think would work but they did. We found that by working with other people you don't limit yourself in ways that you might otherwise do.

Stephen Petronio used a different process. He would come up with a phrase that he made sitting in a chair because he had broken his foot, and the movement was all upper body. His idea was that he wanted to utilise this type of movement and try things that he was a little bit hesitant to try with his own company. He developed a slower, sharper movement to his usual style. He would do a movement, we'd repeat it back however it came out, then we'd have to remember exactly what we did. At the end of four weeks, we had about 45 minutes of material. I think he came out of the process a stronger choreographer and director, I think you can see that in everybody that has worked with us.

EM: What limitations have you encountered in terms of choreography?

JS: Our biggest problem at this point is replacing disabled dancers in order to keep repertoire pieces going. We have considered replacing a disabled dancer with a dancer without disabilities for specific roles, but we knew we would get slammed for that politically. We lost two disabled dancers last year and we didn't have the right configuration to perform some of our repertoire. It's very difficult to understudy, so if someone is injured, that can be a huge problem. We're not exactly replicable! It's tough. It's not so much of a challenge when you are creating work within the company because you don't have such a large financial investment but if you have invested forty, sixty, seventy thousand dollars bringing in a choreographer, you want to be able to use the work again. Replacing a disabled dancer so that you can do that can be a huge problem.

EM: Do you have a training programme within the company?

JS: Well, we run classes all the time but there is a big lack in the field as a whole. There is a huge need to have an international school where people could come to train because most disabled dancers cannot access dance classes, or the teacher may not want them there. One of our big goals is to infiltrate the University of California, because it is really difficult for disabled dancers to get a degree in Dance, even if they are extremely talented choreographers and performers. There's a lack of vision of what a disabled dancer can be, outside of traditional restraints.

We're trying to get an international summer school going with CandoCo in the next few years. We also tried to have a monthly master class so that our community of dancers could work together with other dance communities and share information. The idea was that if a disabled dancer then showed up at another class, the teacher would have some understanding. It's been really successful.

We have a large educational programme running in conjunction with performance. It's a great way to open people's minds to disability and inclusion, difference and collaboration. It's a responsibility that comes with selling the work. Hopefully, it's also a way for us to start reaching a new generation of dancers. Also, if you don't have an educational component of some sort, it's really hard to get funding.

EM: Have you seen any changes in audience perception of integrated dance over the past few years? I noticed you have audience questionnaires available after each performance.

JS: We've been using those for about four years, but the people that fill in the surveys are, for the most part, very positive. I wish that people who have had a miserable experience would also fill them out, but that doesn't happen.

EM: Have there been changes in the way the company has been reviewed?

JS: Originally, we got sympathy reviews and when we eventually got our first negative review, I was really relieved. I felt that people were finally taking us seriously. There was a lot of truth in what that particular review said and it started to fuel my wanting to work with other choreographers and raise the quality of our work. Also, by working with other choreographers, it gives the reviewer a context in which to review our performances. This year we were reviewed by a critic who is an old friend of mine. He had refused to review us up to now because he didn't think that what we were doing was dance. For some weird reason, he showed up last week and gave us a pretty good review which was really surprising, because he had been so adamant that what we were doing was 'victim art'. He actually refused to even discuss integrated dance until last year. The international dialogue on who does art, what it is and how it is reviewed, has had a great impact on people like him. I'm sorry we were a target for his negativity but what better person to review us now!



## **APPENDIX B**

### **Transcript of Personal Interview with Victoria Marks, Choreographer.**

**San Francisco, November 26<sup>th</sup> 2003**

EM: Interviewer, Eimir McGrath

VM: Interviewee, Victoria Marks

EM: Can you tell me about your first experience of choreographing for an integrated dance company?

VM: CandoCo was the first integrated company I choreographed for, in 1993. I choreographed a film dance, *Outside In*. I had never worked with such a diverse group before and in our first rehearsal I said to them "Please teach me how you move". I wanted to create a sequence of movements that everybody there could do equally well. Not as a form of co-op dancing, meaning that something everyone can do is less good, but from a belief that complicated doesn't necessarily mean better. Margaret Williams, the film maker, was working with me because this was going to be a dance for the camera, and it was a very collaborative process. I started by being a student of the performers; to learn how they move; to learn about manual chairs, how the brakes work and when they need to be applied; to learn how to incorporate the chairs into the choreographic sequence. My choreographic ideas were less about movement itself and more about ideas. I was, and still am, interested in how disability is positioned in our culture.

EM: How did the choreographic process develop with CandoCo?

VM: Well, because it was dance for the camera, I was given a specific length of time, thirteen minutes I think. I'd never made a dance for the camera before so a lot of the focus was on trying to understand what that medium was. One thing that struck me was that in one thirteen minute viewing we would have an opportunity to change the representation of disability, more people were going to see my work than would ever see my stage work in my entire life. Now I know that's a little bit grandiose, but I'm always asking myself what do we go to the theatre for, what am I choreographing for, and there's always a myriad of reasons. I feel I need to understand the usefulness of dance, that it can't be just a rubber stamp of class. So, with CandoCo, I went to them and asked "what are your issues, what does this company want to do?" They talked very clearly about invisibility and how they were made feel invisible by little things, like the fact that people didn't look at them as they pass by, that shameful ignoring of someone. They really wanted to invest in the idea of an inclusive community. I worked with that idea and that is what really drove the piece, making these people incredibly visible. That meant doing things such as dyeing their hair gorgeously red.

EM: Did you use the same approach when working with Axis Dance this year?

VM: Well I thought I would look at desire, because we don't often think about people in wheelchairs, or people missing limbs, or people with whatever type of disability, as being both desirable and desiring. That became my point of departure for investigation; I'm not interested in the movement first. I used lots of improvisation and games, sometimes movement driven. I remember the early part of our classes worked on connecting desire

with reaching, so we thought of how many different ways you could reach or be pulled. Sometimes this would make a lot of sense for everybody and sometimes different people had different reactions. Another day, I told everybody to go off and make a parody of desire and some of those pieces remain in the choreography. So I see it as a hugely collaborative process, I'm not there to give movement but I'm there to deal with ideas and think about the craft.

EM: So was the choice of material after improvisation also a collaborative process?

VM: No. A large part of the process was what I call collecting. I would come in each day with a different problem to solve or a game to play. We were looking to expand a creative vocabulary that was driven by a set of ideas. I took pieces of movement; for example, I took this little cartoon of desire that was made and I worked on top of it. I made it so that the whole company could do it, although it was originally created by only four people. I thought about desire and noticed that it seemed to play itself out in horizontal space, it was really about the person across the room, or the person 'over there'.

The other thing that interested me was how could you animate an inanimate body such as a marionette? It was an idea that came from thinking about what would it mean to have a fully alive and subjective person, who has an inanimate body, animating a dead thing. I was curious to see what would happen so we went and got some marionettes but that concept didn't last to the end of the process. But it did lead on to further development. I realized that what I was interested in was gravity and weight. I noticed that gravity moved in a vertical axis and that desire was moving horizontally; it seemed to be about heaven and earth, life and death. So then I tried to put these two ideas together and that

really became the focus of the work, working with gravity and desire; working with the metaphor of life and death, loss and need.

So then, those people that are 'disabled' are not accessory to this project, because they have been at the forefront of the development of ideas. We work with what everybody brings to the table, who brings it is not important.

EM: How has your approach to integrated dance changed since your first experience of choreographing for an integrated company ten years ago?

VM: In terms of my relationship with disability at that time, ten years ago, it was definitely about being provocative and confronting people with another way of looking at disability. I remember that some of the focus at CandoCo was the wish to be neutral, to be treated the same as any other dance company. Then one day we shot a movement sequence through the spokes of the wheelchair and when we looked at it later, Margaret, myself, and the dancers all hated it. The dancers said they wanted to be neutral, not seen through the image of a wheelchair. I understood what they were saying, but I also began to understand something else. There is no neutral. You are disabled, or defined as disabled, and you must move the identification of that idea. It is the meaning that has to change, you cannot obliterate the meaning and become neutral.

We did the *Outside In* project with that thought in mind. It was really about not being neutral. It stated "we are here, we are sexy, we are funny, we are smart, we know you are filming us. We leave prints wherever we go, different prints. Some people leave footprints, some people leave chairprints, whatever. We're here, we're not going away and we are fully alive and we have full subjectivity." That is what we set out to show in the film and in a sense I think it was really emblematic of the moment in time in which

there was an assertion 'don't ignore that I am disabled, but recognize what I can do.' I really wanted to make a piece so that all the dancers in the company, regardless of their ability, were profoundly woven into the same fabric of mortality and humanity.

This was also the aim of my most recent work with Axis, although I don't feel I have to make a point any more

EM: Is that because of your own beliefs or because society has changed its perceptions of disability?

VM: No, I don't think society has particularly moved on. I think that I have certainly moved on and Axis has moved on. Those people that are engaging in dance have moved on. CandoCo no longer has the shock value it had ten years ago, though I suspect that if you took a piece like *Outside In* to other parts of the world, say Eastern Europe, it would still be powerfully relevant for a disabled community that's completely ignored and not recognized.

EM: What importance would you give to vocational training for dancers with disability?

VM: I don't really think that training is the crux of the matter. In Axis at the moment, there are two dancers with disability who were not trained as dancers but they have been professional dancers for so long that they have developed with the company. I think we have to revise our idea of what training is. I feel so fearful and angry at the academy, holding on to some idea of standard so rigidly. They are so afraid of any deterioration of their idea of a standard. They think that if something else exists as an argument against their kind of rigorous technique, their own world will crumble and fall apart. I work with

many virtuosic dancers and I work with virtuosic dancers who have disabilities. For Judy in her chair, the chair is like an addition to her body. How it moves, its speeds and stopping, its turning radius, they are all part of her movement repertoire as well as how her own body moves. Her partnering, her intention as she works, are full of nuance. Celeste in CandoCo has a level of information that is quite extraordinary. By being in the company with her, other dancers can grow. I don't think training is a primary factor.

EM: Has your own choreographic process changed through the experience of working with integrated dance?

VM: Working with disability has made me understand so much more clearly how each person is unique and moves in a unique way. We come from traditions like ballet where we try to create a uniform body; we aspire toward the removal of idiosyncrasy, a removal of personal movement trace. We try to create a sort of 'civic' body. Over the last ten years I've really appreciated, through these choreographic processes, that everyone moves differently and if you really engage people, they will come forward from that place where their movement is authentic to them.

## APPENDIX C

### **Transcript of Personal Interview with Celeste Dandeker, Artistic Director of CandoCo Dance Company.**

**London, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2004**

EM: Interviewer, Eimir McGrath

CD: Interviewee, Celeste Dandeker

EM: What were the aims of the company at its inception?

CD: To some degree, we have had the same aims all along. Obviously, we want to make high quality artistic work and to be a flexible, professional company, so that the dancers experience working with different styles and input. They can develop and grow with their training. The educational side is very important to the company.

EM: Did you find that the company was more issue driven at the start?

CD: No, the company has never had any issues, I'm not interested. That is one of the main differences between us and companies such as Axis. The focus has always been on dance and the quality of the work. I think having been a professional dancer before I was disabled, that was the only way it could be. I certainly didn't want to be patronized. People

are paying to come and see you, so you have got to give them a good show and give the highest quality of performance that you can.

EM: Do you think there has been any change in audience perceptions of integrated dance over the years?

CD: At the time when CandoCo started performing, we were very lucky to get a lot of exposure. First of all, we worked with Victoria Marks on a film for television that was seen by a huge audience all around the world. Then we did a project called the *Ballroom Blitz* which was a summer festival. We won a *Time Out* award for that and that led to the *South Bank* inviting us to develop the piece and perform it at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Since then we've had a wonderful relationship with them and have performed nearly every new programme there.

Audiences over the last few years have been made up of dancers, educators, trainers, a huge cross section of society. They come because they're interested to see how choreographers work with our company. They come to see the work, not the disability. I wish the critics would drop the disability angle. I think there is much more openness and acceptance now.

EM: Do you see any cultural differences between CandoCo and Axis Dance?

CD: I would think that the culture in both countries in relation to dance is wrong, but I think that because of our funding system, our company has been able to progress at a much quicker rate. Our dancers are employed full time, this is their career. Axis dancers are professional, but they have to have other jobs as well, they don't have the funding to



be full time dancers. Another big difference is that from the beginning it was always important for us to have outside influences choreographically, to challenge the dancers. Axis worked internally for many years, they didn't have any outside influences. I think the different physicalities in a company challenge choreographers in different ways and this filters down through the whole dance culture eventually. I think it's great that Axis are now working with outside choreographers. It will broaden their skills.

Back in 1996, we attended an international wheelchair dance festival in Boston and we first saw Axis, among others, perform there. We were curious because we thought that America would be way ahead, but we were amazed to see how behind they were in artistic quality at that time. Many of the able bodied dancers in those integrated companies were not very good, but it seemed that it didn't really matter because they were dancing with people with disabilities. We had quite a few discussions with Judith Smith at that time about what we were doing and how it compared to the way they were working. Things have changed a lot since then in America.

EM: What has influenced your choice of choreographers who have worked with the company?

CD: I always like to work with choreographers whose work I've seen and it has excited me, and I think their way of working will really suit the company. The dancers and I talk about what work inspires us and then I go out and seek those choreographers.

EM: When choreographers come and work with you, is it a collaborative process?

CD: Mostly it is collaborative because that is the nature of contemporary dance. Sometimes a choreographer will come in and say 'do this, do that' but mostly they work through improvisation and by giving ideas out. Stephen Petronio started by asking the dancers to think of five memories and to write down how they felt physically, spiritually and mentally. He then asked them to improvise, which they did, and that was the starting point for the work.

EM: Do you think that a choreographer's subsequent work is influenced in any way after working with CandoCo?

CD: Now that's really interesting because Finn Walker said that working with us had really influenced her work, and she had worked with us the same way she would work with any other dance company. There were definite memories of our work in her new work, it was fantastic. I think a choreographer can't help but be more open as a result of working with us. Stephen Petronio said it changed him. He said it was one of the most incredible experiences he had had and it was wonderful the way the dancers were able to connect with a choreographer like that. It can be a very hard process, but for the choreographer to really enjoy being the student is wonderful.

EM: What limitations have you encountered in terms of choreography?

CD: It's difficult to retain repertoire because pieces are made on specific dancers. You can sometimes interchange things. We had a piece that one of our dancers choreographed for an educational residency. Last year we lost a female dancer and gained a male dancer. Both had similar physicalities and abilities so the male dancer was able to take on the

female role, so it can be cross gender and occasionally it works. Of course, able bodied dancers are much easier to find. It is sad that some things can't be done again when the dancers change. Our last programme was a real joy, three different works that we can't repeat, but that's the way it is.....

EM: How important is training in developing integrated dance?

CD: This is a difficulty. Most of our dancers with disabilities, in the past, have done work with us in workshops or summer schools before becoming part of the company. Mark O'Toole was a trained dancer before he became disabled. Some of our other disabled dancers have had some dance training. At the moment, CandoCo are involved in writing a foundation course for dancers with disabilities. I'm more involved in performance myself rather than education, but I think they are both of equal importance.

EM: Do you aim to develop an informed audience through your education programme or is your emphasis more on creating potential dancers?

CD: We meet both needs. We teach a variety of people, from primary school age to the over sixties. One year we reached over six thousand people. We have been working on developing a company class that every company member can take part in together and we also teach an open class for professionals and dancers. We've been working on how to teach it and there is a vocabulary developing though the emphasis is much more on quality of movement. Sometimes you'll need to find a term that will make the same exercise accessible to everybody.

EM: Have you seen any changes in critics' perceptions of integrated dance?

CD: Yes. I think things are changing. Some journalists came on tour with us, one came to Moscow and one came to Prague and after spending time with us, they developed a real understanding of the work. They got to talk to the choreographers and the dancers and I think their perceptions changed. What really annoys me though is when critics review a performance and only mention the disabled dancers. I feel that the able bodied dancers are being cheated of their just rewards because the quality of their work isn't always recognized. Our performances are the flagship of the company, they underpin everything. That is where my heart is.



FIGURE 1 *GIMP*

By kind permission, Luke Oulsen (2009)



FIGURE 2 *Diagnosis of a Faun*

By kind permission, Julie Lemberger (2009)



FIGURE 3. *water burns sun*

By kind permission, Adoniou Yannis (2009)